No 4 April/May 1980

the next step

...iew of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency 20p



THE PRICE OF TUC LEADERSHIP

THE STEEL STRIKE was the longest national stoppage in Britain since the Second World War. For 13 weeks the steelworkers held out against the employers and the government. The defeat of their courageous struggle before Easter is a setback to the entire labour movement.

Employers on the offensive

The unions' agreement to a wage rise well below the rate of inflation, punitive local productivity deals and massive redundancies was the outcome of the strategy of the trade union leadership. The steelworkers' leaders all made the viability of the British Steel Corporation their prime concern. They ended up sacrificing their members' livelihoods for the sake of the profitability of British industry.

The steel settlement comes at the same time as a number of other setbacks to the working class. At British Leyland, management has imposed a pay and productivity deal which means a 10-15 per cent cut in real wages and threatens to destroy shop floor union organisation. Throughout the public sector cash limits have been squeezed to push wages down and slash jobs. And Chancellor Geoffrey Howe's recent budget steps up the onslaught on workers' living standards.

How the TUC helps the Tories

The TUC's main criticism of the Tory Government is not that it attacks the working class but that it does so without consulting the trade union leaders. The TUC bureaucrats thrived on the consensus politics that prevailed before Britain was plunged into crisis: they constantly hark back to the role they played over the last decade as close collaborators in the affairs of state. TUC general secretary Len Murray took to the Trafalgar Square stage during the March demonstration against the Government only to plead with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher not to close the door to consultation. Meanwhile the TUC helps the Government to deal with working class opposition.

The TUC orchestrated the sell-out of the steel strike. While militants faced scab lorries and police boots on picket lines the dignitaries of the TUC Steel Committee met with BSC officials in Brussels. Together they hammered out 'a planned reduction of manning levels and a programme of reconstruction of British steel' (TUC General Council minutes, 23 January 1980).

It is no surprise, then, that the TUC leaders failed to lift a finger in three and a half months to organise effective solidarity action for the steelworkers. They helped the Government by keeping the steelworkers isolated from the rest of the labour movement. And when groups of workers – miners and dockers – tried to organise sympathy strikes the TUC sabotaged them.

While protesting about Employment Secretary James Prior's plans to curb picketing and solidarity action, the TUC worked energetically throughout the steel strike to curb rank and file militancy. The TUC opposes legal restraints on the unions because they restrict the bureaucrats' room to manoeuvre. It wants voluntary rules, TUC guidelines, which enhance the power and importance of the union leaders. And now Len Murray takes comfort from the Tory moderates, commending their desire for conciliation while condemning the Cabinet hawks' relish for confrontation.

Labour helps the Tories too

The inquiry that finally sank the steelworkers' hopes of victory was first suggested by Labour Party leaders James Callaghan and Michael Foot. Its members – Harold Lever, Richard Marsh and Bill Keys – all had one thing in common: membership of the Labour Party. Lever and Marsh are both ex-Ministers and Keys is a senior TUC bureaucrat. The Labour Party co-operated with the TUC to achieve a settlement which would benefit British steel's profit margins. The 'impartial' inquiry did the Tories' dirty work – securing the acceptance of terms which would have been contemptuously rejected had they been offered by BSC bosses Scholey or Villiers or their Government overlord Keith Joseph.

Action against the Tories?

The TUC has called a Day of Action against Government policy on 14 May. The labour bureaucrats want to stay at the head of workers' resentment over the cuts, the steel strike and other industrial disputes. They will try to dissipate the 14 May protest by stopping short of calling for national strike action and holding a large number of regional demonstrations. At the same time the union leaders tried to put a halt to plans for a special Labour Party conference.

When Labour's left-wing National Executive called for a special conference against the Tories the trade union leaders were horrified. Although the initiative for the conference came from TGWU leader Moss Evans, his TUC colleagues were worried that it might come under the control of the left. They feared an explosion of working class anger over cuts, closures and redundancies. Concerned that the leadership might lose its grip, senior bureaucrats tried unsuccessfully to have the conference replaced by a harmless protest rally.

The recession is now forcing the pace of the class struggle in Britain. The labour bureaucracy is squeezed between its complicity in government attacks on the working class and its role as representative of the interests of the labour movement. The Tories, like the TUC, want to return to consensus – but on different terms from the past. They need to re-establish TUC co-operation in conditions of mass unemployment and wage cuts.

Fighting back

Our problem is that the most militant workers have no political alternative to the strategy of the labour bureaucracy. The lesson of the steel strike is that we need to have a decisive reply when the employers threaten closures in response to pay claims and try to play off job losses against wage rises. A reply which puts working class interests to the fore and rejects the demands of British capitalism can put the coming battles over redundancies on a solid foundation. And it will also be an answer to the strategy of the labour bureaucracy which has had such disastrous consequences in recent months.

Zimbabwe
Who won?

THE INSTALLATION of the new government of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe has been hailed on all sides as a victory. Lord Carrington and Margaret Thatcher acclaimed a victory for British diplomacy and administrative skill. The British labour movement celebrated a victory of the national liberation movement in Zimbabwe. And the Patriotic Front claimed an electoral triumph after a long and hard fought guerrilla struggle. As the Union Jack is hauled down for the last time in Salisbury, we ask – who really won in Zimbabwe?

Everyone a winner?

The British ruling class immediately gave Mugabe the thumbs up. As *The Times* put it, 'What we have here is a British success story'. The Tories and the Labour Party rejoiced in Parliament at the news of the Patriotic Front's election success:

'it was a day for congratulations all round. Seldom can the opposing sides of the Commons and the Lords have been so united as they were yesterday in their acceptance of the success of the Rhodesian exercise.' (*The Times*, 5 March 1980)

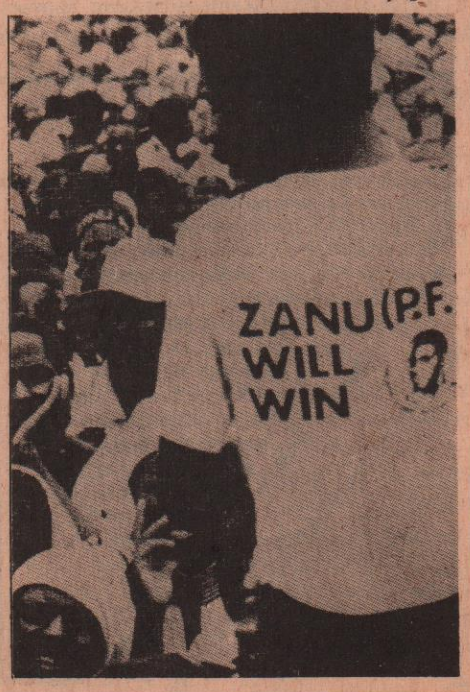
The labour movement added its congratulations: hundreds of trade unions, trades councils and labour movement conferences sent greetings to the new Government. The left went further. The Socialist Workers Party pronounced:

'It is a victory which will disturb the sleep of many, in Pretoria and London and Washington. It is our victory too.' (*Socialist Worker*, 8 March 1980)

The world's businessmen may be losing sleep because they are working overtime assessing the possibilities for trade and investment in the new Zimbabwe.

The inauguration of the Mugabe regime is the outcome of a successful British holding operation to stabilise capitalist relations in Southern Africa. It is a victory for imperialism over the masses of Zimbabwe, won through the collusion of their petit-bourgeois leadership in Africa and the acquiescence of the labour movement in Britain.

continued on page 2



inside

Protection racket exposed	4
Is a general strike the answer?	5
The cuts: social security scandal, Clay Cross sell-out, white collar conflicts.	11-14
Review: Thatcher and 'Thatcherism'	15

Ireland: Tameside conspiracy

Special feature pages 7,8, 9,10

...Zimbabwe

continued from page 1



From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe

From 1972 until 1979 a bitter guerrilla war engulfed Zimbabwe. It ravaged thousands of acres of farmland and brought the economy to near standstill. It became more and more obvious to the imperialists that white settler rule, and the extreme political oppression of blacks that it entailed, could not be sustained indefinitely. Imperialist interests in Southern Africa could only be safeguarded by transferring political power to a black government. This could retain the allegiance of Africans and, at the same time, revive the economy.

The March 1978 Internal Settlement was an imperialist attempt to set up a black regime in Zimbabwe. It failed because the black signatories – Muzorewa, Sithole, Chirau – lost all credibility with the African people. Carrington's predecessor, Labour Foreign Secretary David Owen, recognised that Patriotic Front leaders Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo were the key figures:

'My position is that if all were included, that would be desirable .... If you can include *one* of the external nationalists then that would help in gaining recognition at the earliest time. They can't come without their men coming with them .... *If you were to get both in so much the better, but at least get Joshua.*' (quoted in *Africa Confidential*, 31 March 1978)

But Owen's attempts to make a deal with the nationalist guerrilla leaders failed. Carrington's achievement was that he landed both fish.

At the Lancaster House Conference last autumn he sat down with Nkomo and Mugabe. And he got results: he bullied the Patriotic Front into concessions that could only mean disaster for the African people. First, Carrington imposed a ceasefire which brought the PF's 25 000-strong guerrilla army into isolated camps. Second, he appointed Lord Soames to hold absolute power until a suitable black government was installed. Third, he made sure that the army and police remained in white hands until the new regime was firmly established.

Soames gets a little help from his friends

Soames arrived in Salisbury in December to run the elections and set up the new government. His first job was to weaken the anti-imperialist movement so that its leaders could be forced as neatly as possible into the mould the British had designed. Mugabe's ZANU(PF) was the major target for repression between the ceasefire and the elections: the government imprisoned thousands of party workers, banned ZANU leader Enos Nkala and tried to bar the whole organisation from campaigning in two provinces.

Despite all this Mugabe and Nkomo remained on good terms with Lord Soames. As he moved in to round up the thousands of guerrillas who ignored the ceasefire the Patriotic Front leaders offered their assistance, threatening to crush the rebels who refused to surrender. Mugabe and Nkomo treated the British as a progressive force which would remove the Smith regime and bring peace and prosperity to Zimbabwe. They held up the terms of the Lancaster House agreement as major concessions, repeatedly calling on Soames to honour them.

A small and relatively weak liberation army confronted by the military might of imperialism is sometimes forced to make compromises. But if the struggle against imperialism is to go forward any compromise must be presented to the masses as what it is – a setback – not welcomed as a major achievement. The Patriotic Front leaders presented their compromises as gains throughout the election campaign: they sought not to overthrow imperialism but to make deals with the imperialist leaders.

Reform or counter-revolution?

ZANU(PF) gained popular support because, throughout the war of liberation, it promised to sweep the new Zimbabwe clean of every vestige of white rule. It mobilised the African masses with socialist rhetoric; its armed opposition to the existing state coincided with the democratic aspirations of the African people. The masses demanded radical land reforms and large-scale nationalisation – ZANU(PF) promised they would have them.

However Mugabe's first priority after the election was to reach an accommodation with imperialism. He immediately abandoned the demands of the people:

'Those who have talked about the possibility of some people being victimised or the possibility of personal and other properties being nationalised, being seized, have not read us correctly. We shall do no such thing.' (*Daily Telegraph*, 5 March 1980)

Mugabe reassured capitalists in Zimbabwe and abroad that their interests would be preserved by appointing two prominent whites – a businessman and a farmer – as Ministers in his Cabinet of national unity. The ZANU leadership made it clear that Zimbabwe would not support the guerrilla struggle against imperialism in South Africa. Mugabe even invited Lord Soames to extend his stay in the country during the first few months of independence.

Mugabe's moderation surprised the bourgeoisie. 'Is there a new Mugabe?' asked *The Economist*, as it pondered over the rapid transformation of a 'Marxist' guerrilla leader into a respectable bourgeois politician. There should have been no surprise. Mugabe's aim had always been merely to make Zimbabwe more democratic. Following the official communist movement ZANU(PF) espouses a 'two-stage' theory of revolution: first the stage of national independence and capitalist development, *then* on to socialism.

'ZANU aims at achieving a socialist revolution. However before the achievement of ... socialist revolution, a transitional stage of National Democratic Revolution is necessary .... The deeper the national democratic revolution the better the conditions for socialist revolution.' (*Zimbabwe News*, July-December 1977)

For ZANU Mugabe's election victory was the 'national democratic revolution'. Now the aim is to build a capitalist Zimbabwe. Mugabe's defence of private property and his opposition to nationalisation follow from this objective. His programme advances the interests of the small group of black Zimbabweans who have a stake in business or farming.

Bitter experience has shown that in backward capitalist countries, such as Zimbabwe, capitalism can only survive through the impoverishment of the masses. ZANU's petit-bourgeois programme leaves socialism for the indefinite future; but even in the present it cannot bring decent living standards and political freedoms to the majority of the African people.

Already the Zimbabwean counter-revolution has begun. Within a fortnight of Mugabe's election victory more than 16 000 workers in Salisbury, Bulawayo and other cities went on strike for higher wages. The new government reacted immediately. Labour Minister Kumbirai Kangai urged moderation. 'Any precipitate action', he said, 'can only serve to damage the goodwill which has been built between government, the employees and their employers and will inevitably have a crippling effect on industry' (*Morning Star*, 19 March 1980). Mugabe's government tries to use the influence of ZANU(PF) among militant workers to get them to accept starvation wages. For black workers in the new Zimbabwe it was strike-breaking as usual.

'British responsibility'

While the British ruling class has been imposing its solution on Zimbabwe it has been able to take comfort from the activities of the labour movement. The Anti-Apartheid Movement, backed by the Labour Party and the Communist Party, has continually deplored the British ruling class' lack of decisiveness in dealing with the 'Zimbabwe problem'. In the run-up to the elections the AAM could only urge Britain to 'stick to the letter and spirit of the Lancaster House Agreement' (*Anti-Apartheid News*, January/February 1980). The AAM wanted to make sure 'the letter and the spirit' of the setback that the Lancaster House agreement represented was fully inflicted on the Zimbabwean people. The AAM simply put a liberal face on the interests of British imperialism.

The same reactionary role was played by the Zimbabwe Emergency Campaign Committee (ZECC) – a front organisation created by the AAM embracing the Socialist Workers Party, the International Marxist Group and the Revolutionary Communist Group. For ZECC the major flaw in Britain's foreign policy was that successive governments 'have refused to take effective action to remove the Smith regime from power since it declared UDI in 1965' (ZECC, *General campaign statement*). By recommending a more aggressive imperialist state, ZECC tried to channel working class sympathy for the Zimbabwean masses into support for British imperialism. Greeting Mugabe's victory, the Communist Party of Great Britain suggested that the 'biggest nail so far is being driven into the coffin of racist rule in Southern Africa' (Editorial, *Morning Star*, 4 March 1980). Before you hammer nails into a coffin it's important to make sure you have a corpse inside. While the CP indulged in daydreams South African capital, very much alive, looked to the new Zimbabwe as a promising sphere of investment.

The Revolutionary Communist Group followed on behind the Stalinists. In its unflinching support for petit-bourgeois nationalism its eyes remained glued to the backsides of Mugabe and Nkomo. The RCG issued this panegyric:

'We salute the landslide victory of ZANU and ZAPU in the Zimbabwean elections. It will give an enormous impetus to the struggle against the racist apartheid regime in South Africa .... A body blow to the British ruling class it is a great step forward for the British working class and the worldwide movement against imperialism.' ('Victory!', *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!*, March/April 1980)

'A body blow to the British ruling class'? Why then was Fleet Street so pleased with the result? 'An enormous impetus to the struggle against the racist apartheid regime in South Africa'? But Mugabe has made it clear that he will give no succour to African National Congress guerrillas. He is pledged to peaceful coexistence, and stronger trade links, with his southern neighbour. Finally it is, we are told, 'a great step forward for the British working class'. On the contrary, events in Zimbabwe have revealed the political weakness of the British labour movement. During the last twenty years it has had no policy on Zimbabwe independent from the British ruling class. This has left the bourgeoisie free to impose its imperialist solution on the liberation movement.

The enemy at home

In the last eight months British imperialism has successfully 'decolonised' Zimbabwe and gone some way towards defusing the potentially explosive situation in Southern Africa. The interests of workers in Zimbabwe now lie in a challenge to Mugabe's compromises with imperialism which mean poverty and oppression for the masses. To carry the struggle against imperialism forward workers need a programme which expresses their interests independently of the petit-bourgeoisie.

The interests of workers in Britain lie in the fight against the same state that still oppresses Zimbabwe – the British state. We must expose all the claims of the British ruling class that it can play a progressive role in Zimbabwe. In particular we must expose all the apologists for British imperialism in the labour movement. In the coming months there will be many opportunities, especially as Zimbabweans suffer the consequences of Mugabe's victory and British workers see the results of 'British responsibility' in Africa.

Andre Robinson

ANOTHER SELL–OUT FOR the next step!

Len Murray, Tom Jackson, Bill Sirs and the rest were not the only people who sold out on the 9 March TUC demonstration against the Government. We sold more than a 1000 copies of *the next step* during the march and rally. Many people from areas where the RCT review is not yet widely available bought their first copy of *the next step*. Although we plan to sell at least 1000 on the 14 May TUC Day of Action, many of our readers aren't able to get hold of *the next step* regularly. There are two ways of solving this problem.

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the next step

Editorial
A night out for the left 3

Imperialism
Zimbabwe – who won? 1

Labour movement
Import controls 4
A general strike to beat the Tories? 5

Ireland
The Tameside conspiracy 7
The NF proposes, the CP disposes 8
No equivocation! 9
Workers Action *backs Labour reaction* 10
SWP's campaign against the PTA 10
NUS cops out over PTA 10

The cuts
'Fairer' won't do 11
Welfare state swindle 12
White collar trade unions 13
Double cross at Clay Cross 14

Racism
Southall – never again? 16

Review
Who's afraid of Margaret Thatcher? 15

Letters 15

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A NIGHT OUT FOR THE LEFT

ON 17 MARCH a 2000-strong audience packed the Methodists' Central Hall, Westminster, for the Labour Co-ordinating Committee's 'Debate of the Decade'. On the platform well known radical left celebrities – 'socialist feminist' Hilary Wainwright, *Daily Mirror* columnist and SWP leader Paul Foot, and the IMG's Tariq Ali – crossed swords with left-wing Labour MPs – Audrey Wise, Stuart Holland and Tony Benn.

The debate was billed as a serious event, a discussion of contending political views that would clarify strategical problems facing socialists. But in fact there was a more sinister motive. The Labour left is anxious to win the support and co-operation of the radical left in its campaign for the return of a Labour government. Despite their success at last year's party conference, Benn and his allies on Labour's National Executive have no mass following. Before the next election they have four years' solid footwork to put in. For that they need help from the radical left – both inside and outside the Labour Party.

The audience left the hall disappointed. The debate was made up of long, boring recitations of well known positions. The tedium was only momentarily broken when anarchist hecklers disrupted the meeting. The audience responded angrily, at once united against this 'threat' to free speech. But by the time a second group of hecklers (this time it was the Revolutionary Communist Group) unfurled a banner denouncing Tony Benn, the audience could not rouse itself to protest. Everybody sat back to watch the debate of the decade unfold.

The great non-debate

As it turned out the platform speakers had no major political differences. The main disputes concerned secondary, tactical and organisational issues. None of the radical left speakers could provide a political alternative to the Labour Party. Of course Tariq Ali promised to 'settle accounts with Labourism' and Paul Foot denounced the reformist road to socialism. But the thrust of their criticism was the reiteration of the time-honoured radical left dogma that the Labour Party relies too much on Parliament and not enough on mass activity. The Labour left MPs brushed that one off with ease – they agreed that extra-Parliamentary activity was important, but argued that socialists could not ignore Westminster.

Anybody in the audience new to politics would have thought that the key problem of the day was how much emphasis to put on the votes of MPs. They would not have realised that the crucial issue is the political programme to be pursued – none of the participants thought it worth a mention. And nobody dared to suggest that the Labour Party is just as capable of selling workers out on the shop floor as it is in Parliament.

Instead Paul Foot talked endlessly about 'two different roads' – one through Parliament, the other through 'mass action'. For Foot the problem was not reformist politics but the fact that when the Labour Party was in government 'they were not in charge of what they were doing'. He repeated the Labour left's explanation for the reactionary measures of the last Labour Government: the IMF had reversed its policies. One radical left speaker after another painted a picture of the Labour Party as a well intentioned body doomed to failure by the manipulations of Whitehall civil servants, the multi-nationals and the gnomes of Zurich.

Nobody challenged the Labour left's reactionary programme – its nationalist Alternative Economic Strategy, its support for Britain's oppression of Ireland or its championing of 'non-racist' immigration controls. None of the speakers exposed the Labour left's repeated betrayals of working class interests. They differed on a tactic – the use of Parliament – not on the content of reformist politics.

From Parliament to the shop floor

With studied passion Paul Foot pleaded: 'we've got to go back to where the power is, not Parliament but the shop floor'. He forgot that it is on the factory floor, in pits and offices, and not in Parliament, that the grip of reformism is tightest. Militancy, which Foot idealises as 'shop floor power', has not been enough to defend workers against the capitalist class. In the past decade reformist leaders have never lost control over their members. Their programme of economic nationalism and state reforms has paralysed one struggle after another. The steelworkers are only the latest example.

Reformist politics drive workers to look for a solution to unemployment and falling living standards within the confines of capitalism. Although they may join in strikes and demonstrations, reformists aim to achieve changes within the existing framework of society. The consequence of this programme for workers is that they are forced to assume responsibility for the stability of capitalist society – for 'their' industry, the British economy and, of course, the nation. As a result, working class interests are submerged beneath those of the ruling class.

When the steelworkers are told that they must choose between a pay rise and the survival of BSC, reformists will look for a compromise. Workers who follow this path will find that it is always their interests which are sacrificed. We can see why. Crisis-ridden capitalism could not survive if workers were prepared to put their interests first. But reformists would rather prop up the system than see it collapse. As long as they remain in the leadership of struggles the gains made by the working class will be partial and short-lived.

Despite its pretensions to leading mass struggles the radical left has no monopoly of extra-parliamentary activity. Arthur Scargill is a man of action. He has no qualms about organising flying pickets and calling on workers to break the law. While Tony Benn lectures Parliament on the need for a just society, Scargill takes the same message to militants at the pit head. Indeed Benn's survival in Parliament depends on his division of labour with Scargill. When Scargill leads struggles he leads them in a particular direction. He is an enthusiastic supporter of import controls and planning agreements. At a recent meeting in defence of sacked Leyland convenor Derek Robinson he issued chauvinist denunciations of 'Hirohito' Edwardes.

The radical left may worship the shop floor and detest the thought of trooping through the lobbies at Westminster. But if they looked closer Paul Foot and Tariq Ali would find that the difference exists mainly in their imagination.

It is not *where* you operate that makes revolutionary politics distinct, but the final objective and the political strategy. Revolutionaries see that the proletariat must conquer political power: this informs every aspect of their day-to-day work. The break between a revolutionary strategy and reformism is not a question of of which forums you use. As the revolutionary leader Rosa Luxemburg put it:

> 'people who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform *in place of and in contradistinction to* the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the *same* goal, but a different goal.' (*Reform or revolution*, 1900)

The speakers in the 'Debate of the Decade' were united in the presumption that 'although we have our differences we all share the same aims'. Luxemburg's contribution to the revolutionary movement was to show that its differences with the reformists concerned not merely tactics and strategy but the objective of the struggle itself. Revolutionaries aim to destroy capitalism; reformists want to reform it. By ignoring the *content* of reformism the radical left shows that it can give no political lead – either in Parliament or on the shop floor.

The in words

Throughout the evening everybody made sure that tactical differences over the question of Parliament did not overshadow areas of agreement. Both sides of the debate paid their respects to the hallowed institutions of the radical left. The shop stewards movement, women's liberation and the Anti-Nazi League were in. 'Sectarianism', polemics and orthodox Marxism were out.

Hilary Wainwright noted that these independent movements were far more democratic and accountable than either reformist or revolutionary organisations. Paul Foot hung his head in shame and admitted that the SWP is still 'haunted by the spectre of sectarianism'. Tariq Ali concurred as he urged on the audience the virtues of 'new forms of organisation and new structures'. From the floor feminist Lyn Segal asserted that 'everything good comes from outside revolutionary organisations and reformist parties'. She moaned on: 'meetings like this are totally alienating'. Her plea for compassion (and smaller meetings) brought the house down.

Every statement pledging support for loose, incoherent movements was greeted with thunderous applause. The Anti-Nazi League was the model to pursue – anybody could join and nobody had to take any responsibility for it. Militant's Tony Saunois was the only speaker to disturb the atmosphere of confusion and self-indulgence. The audience drowned out his contribution from the floor with a chorus of jeers. Why? Certainly not because the gathering objected to his particular brand of reformism. Saunois made three serious errors. He spoke loudly, he waved his arm and, worst of all, he took his argument and his organisation seriously. This man obviously wasn't a nice person, but 'a sectarian'.

Politics and organisation

The radical left's methods of organisation reflect its narrow political objectives. If all you want is more extra-parliamentary action, then a series of 'autonomous movements' will suffice. Politically confident revolutionaries who are capable of leading working class struggles are unnecessary. Instead we should strive to become 'real individuals', nice and always open to new ideas. The radical left has rediscovered the critique of revolutionary organisation which the Mensheviks, the Jewish Bund and the anarcho-syndicalists advanced 80 years ago. Like the left today they sought to protect their individuality from democratic centralism. Lenin drew out the link between their desire for autonomous organisation and their petit-bourgeois politics:

> 'Sneering at discipline – autonomism – . . . there you have the ladder which our opportunism in matters of organisation now climbs and now descends, skipping from rung to rung and skilfully dodging any definite statement of its principles. Exactly the same stages are displayed by opportunism in matters of programme and tactics . . . .' (*One step forward, two steps back*, 1904)

Benn and his friends can always assimilate the radical left. In fact the Labour Party might have been specially designed for this purpose. It is, as Harold Wilson used to say, 'a broad church', always ready to absorb dissenters – especially from the left. As befits a Christian with great respect for the traditions of the Labour Party, Tony Benn has recently revived Wilson's catchphrase in his appeals to the 'far left' to join the party.

The ecumenical spirit

It was left to Tariq Ali to preach a sermon for inter-denominational unity. He told the congregation that 'revolutionary' organisations should have the right to affiliate to the Labour Party. Ali produced a strategy that, he hoped, even the non-conformists could adhere to: 'Let's agree to differ, but we will fight the Tories together, alongside and in the Labour Party'. Three hours of the great debate had shown exactly what Tariq Ali meant by 'settling accounts with Labourism'.

The more each speaker emphasised the importance of the debate the less convincing he sounded. The critical observer would have noticed that there was no political debate, that everybody would tell the working class to vote Labour and that in fact nothing much was said. The last speaker, Audrey Wise, hit the nail on the head when she asked: 'does that mean we can draw only empty conclusions?' Of course nobody wanted to answer that, so she did it herself. When all else fails, she reckoned, 'the power of reason and love' will prevail.

Fighting Labourism in the real world

Far away from Westminster the class struggle continued. In the real world events move quickly. The management of BL threw 25 years of 'industrial relations' practice out the window and threatened to impose its own pay deal on the workforce. The TUC plumped for 'a day of action' instead of a 'general strike' on 14 May. And the Cambridge Economic and Policy Group predicted that unemployment would reach 2.5 million in 1981. On picket lines, at mass meetings and demonstrations the Labour Party and the TUC do everything in their power to prevent debate.

A few hours before the debate the TUC Joint Consultative Committee met to discuss a conference which Tameside Trades Council planned to hold on Ireland. Its aim was to prevent the conference from turning into a real debate on Ireland – and to force the Trades Council to break any association with the Revolutionary Communist Tendency. Ten days later the General Council expelled an unrepentent Trades Council from the TUC.

The labour bureaucracy cannot allow real debate in the working class. If workers were to hammer out the issues that confront the labour movement and put their answers into practice the power of the labour bureaucracy would begin to crumble. It is this process that *the next step* aims to set in motion.

Import controls: Protection racket

All sorts of people are calling for import controls now – to save British industry, to save British jobs, to rescue Britain from the recession. We look at Marx's attitude to trade policy, at the political consequences of labour movement support for import controls in the past, and at the SWP's apology for import controls today.

IMPORT CONTROLS are a key feature of the official labour movement's response to the capitalist crisis. After the March meeting of the TUC's Economic Committee, Len Murray claimed that only import controls could prevent greater unemployment in coal, steel and textiles.

Sections of the capitalist class have also taken up the call to protect British industry from foreign imports. The CBI admits that temporary import controls in certain product sections 'must be regarded as fair' (*The Sunday Times*, 16 March 1980). British Leyland has spent millions of pounds persuading people to buy British. And recently Tory MP Alan Clark urged Thatcher not to reject the concept of import controls:

'The principal political objection is the concept's association with the intemperate left wing of the Labour Party national executive committee. But this is to miss the real point, namely that the advantages of guaranteed markets, expanding job opportunities, increased investments and higher revenue would accrue under conditions of Tory freedom and mobility . . . .' ('Adding weight to the protectionist argument', *The Times*, 7 March 1980)

Yet the 'concept' of import controls isn't the exclusive preserve of the left wing of the Labour Party. The Communist Party and the National Front both support it. And even the Socialist Workers Party has come out in favour of curbs on imports of coking coal to South Wales. But are import controls in the interest of the working class?

They do as they please

The bourgeoisie is always faced with a choice between free trade and state-regulated trade. It opens up or restricts trade in accordance with the requirements of production.

When the bourgeoisie of a particular nation feels stronger than its competitors abroad it adopts the 'philosophy' of free trade. Britain in the nineteenth century and the USA in the post-war period were able to use their economic strength to enter foreign markets and see their rivals off. Not surprisingly, learned books appeared on the virtues of free trade and solemn pledges were made about a continued commitment to the market mechanism. However, as soon as the bourgeoisie feels threatened by its competitors it denounces their production techniques as unfair, their sales methods as underhand and their pricing policies as unscrupulous. Today when British capitalists sell their goods overseas it's called trade; when Japanese capitalists do the same thing it's called dumping.

The aim of capitalist production is profit. But each employer can only realise the profits he extracts from his workers if he can sell the products they make on the market. The capitalist class of every nation therefore wants unrestricted access to the markets of its competitors and complete control over its domestic market. And to get what it wants it will resort to whatever mixture of free trade and protectionism is expedient. In practice economic philosophy goes out the window the more the battle for a larger portion of the world market becomes a fight for survival.

They say it's all for the best

The bourgeoisie always justifies its trade policy by presenting its own interests as those of society as a whole. The capitalist class understands that labour movement support for its trade policies helps not only in the struggle against hostile forces abroad, but also in the struggle to retain power over the working class at home. If it can convince workers that the future of 'their' industry and of 'their' country is in jeopardy, it can get them to join forces with their exploiters and push the class struggle into the background. The British bourgeoisie was the first to adopt this strategy back in the nineteenth century.

Corn Capitalism

In the 1830s and 1840s British capitalists wanted to repeal the Corn Laws passed to prevent corn being imported freely. Prices for home-grown grain were high and the employers felt that, by importing it instead, they could keep the cost of food down. This would have enabled them to reduce their wage bills by paying workers less.

Prominent capitalists agitated among the workers to support the repeal of the Corn Laws, promising that free trade would mean a higher standard of living. They told the Chartist movement to abandon its 'utopian' dream of free, universal suffrage for the more immediate goal of free trade. But the Chartists saw through their manoeuvre. Marx commended them for preventing most workers from supporting their employers' appeals. The bourgeoisie's first attempt to use trade policy to win workers to its cause failed. Marx approached the controversy over free trade and protectionism from an assessment of its impact on the working class. He concluded that the conditions under which trade was conducted were the concern of the capitalists, not the workers. If workers started worrying about their country's performance on the world market they would be unable to defend their own class interests.

Marx held that the job of the working class was not to help the employers realise their profits more easily but to abolish the profit system altogether. In effect, if not in intention, workers who came out in favour of a particular trade policy were saying 'this is the way our exploiters should go about their business'. Once this happened it proved hard to stop the bosses finding other ways of going about their business – by driving down wages and giving people the sack.

Marx rejected controls on imports not because he thought free trade was better, not because they were unsound economic strategy but because workers who backed them inevitably came to identify with the existing mode of production. As he observed:

'The preservation, the conservation of the present state of affairs is . . . the best result the protectionists can achieve in the most favourable circumstances. Good, but the problem for the working class is not to preserve the present state of affairs, but to transform it into its opposite.' (*The protectionists, the free traders and the working class*, 1847)

Marx argued that to protect an industry was to protect the hold its owners had over the workers. Those who called for controls on imports looked to the bosses to maintain workers' livelihoods. Marx explained that import controls were just another tack that the capitalists chose to realise the surplus-value they sweated out of their workforces. His attitude was: it's *their* trade and *their* industry; we should be indifferent about which straw the capitalists clutch at to save themselves from ruin.

'Your country needs you'

The successes British capitalism met with on the world market of the nineteenth century had a profound effect on the British working class. Skilled workers in particular were able to derive considerable benefits from Britain's expansion overseas. By the time Britain had begun to divide up the world into colonies, a clearly defined aristocracy of labour had emerged, composed of the highest paid and best educated section of the working class.

This layer came to dominate the organisations of the labour movement; and it was in its nature to identify the maintenance of its material privileges with the well-being of British industry. As a consequence the view that working class living standards could be improved by helping the employers beat their foreign competitors gained ground in the trade unions.

The links formed between the emergent labour bureaucracy and capitalist industry worked to the bosses' advantage. Every time a British firm found itself facing strong competition from abroad its proprietor could ask his workers to postpone their claims for more pay and better conditions until he got back on top. During the struggle for an eight hour working day in the late nineteenth century union leaders put their members' interests second when the employers sought their co-operation.

While thousands of British workers were dying prematurely as a result of gross exploitation, their leaders tried to halt the drive to shorten the working day. The leadership of the cotton workers was so anxious about the fortunes of the British linen industry that it denounced foreign trading practices, alien ideologies (socialism) and the eight hour day in one breath:

'There is not an intelligent spinner . . . but what knows how, at the present time, our trade is being cramped by the protective policy of Continental and American nations . . . . The men who are agitating for the eight hours a day have learned their creed from German agitators. Let the German and French and other Continental workmen stick to their creed and reduce their own working hours to our level . . . .' (*Cotton spinners' annual report*, 1888)

By fretting about what they termed 'our trade', the leaders of Britain's unions urged workers to give up their class interests for those of the bourgeoisie. They made sure that the struggle for the eight hour day became a long and arduous one. More than that, they encouraged British workers to hold their class allies abroad in contempt. The outcome of this was that, by 1918, millions of British workers lay dead after fighting their German brothers in the trenches of northern France and Belgium.

The price of protectionism

With the dawning of the twentieth century, the era of imperialism and of capitalist decline, each national bourgeoisie could only brave the stormy seas of international competition with its working class in tow. And it was the labour bureaucracy that gave the bourgeoisie the rope it needed to tie workers to its fate.

By the late 'twenties and 'thirties the labour bureaucrats began to portray protectionist policies as socialist. The General Council of the TUC, for instance, saw import controls as progressive because they could be used by the state to overcome the anarchy of capitalism. About free trade, it proclaimed:

'To the trade union and labour movements it can hardly be an ultimate ideal, since these movements rest on the belief that there should be a conscious control of all economic and political factors that can be controlled in the interests of human welfare.' (*TUC annual report*, 1930)

The more British industry was ravaged by the Depression, the more the labour bureaucracy urged workers to call for state initiatives against foreign manufacturers.

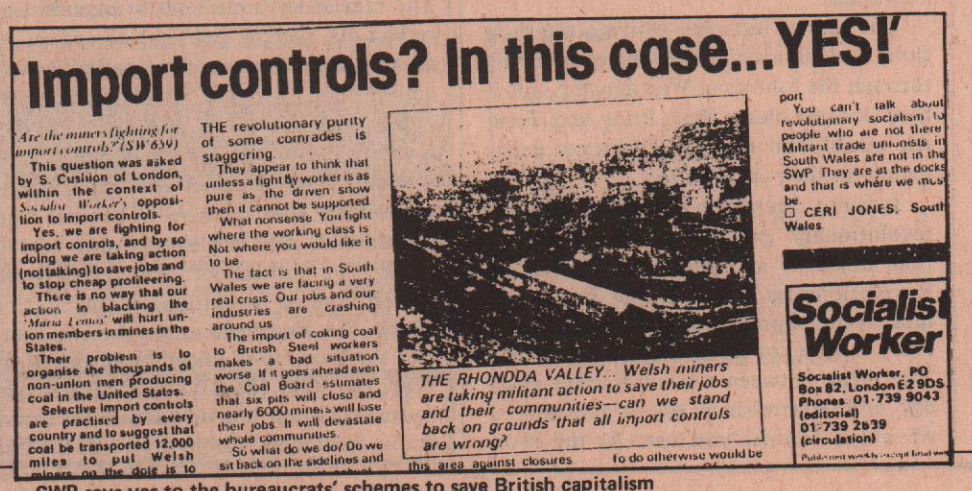
When the Labour Party and trade union leaders joined Churchill's 1940 Government they took the politics of 'conscious control' of British trade to its logical conclusion. In the 'thirties they had applauded the 'conscious control' of German coal imports into Britain and of Japanese cloth imports into the Empire; in the 'forties they went on to distinguish themselves by their 'conscious control' of 'exports' to Dresden and Hiroshima. This was the price the workers of the world paid for their leaders' protectionist persuasions.

Immediately after the Second World War Britain was too weak to relax the autarkic trade policies it had been forced to fall back on since 1931. Import controls only went out of fashion in the boom years of the 'fifties and 'sixties, when, like every other imperialist power, Britain had something to gain from free trade. Yet now the crisis is back the leaders of the British working class want to follow in the footsteps of the post-war Labour Government and insulate Britain's industries from foreign products once again. *What they don't realise is that they are preparing the labour movement for yet another war.* That is the significance of their calls for import controls today.

Fight capitalism, not imports

It is not a matter of whether import controls should be temporary or permanent, selective or comprehensive. Nor is it a matter of whether foreign countries will or will not retaliate against them. Nor, lastly, is it a matter of whether import controls 'work': though they can provide the capitalist class with a breathing-space in which to reorganise industry, they won't stop it forcing through wage cuts and redundancies when times get rough. The point about the call for import controls is that, when workers take it up, they drop the fight for their own interests in favour of coming to the bosses' rescue. *The call for import controls is part of a wider programme of economic nationalism which advances a chauvinist solution to the problems facing the working class.*

The call for import controls is an attempt to confirm that British workers have more in common with their employers than with their class allies abroad. British textile workers, for example, have



Import controls? In this case...YES!'

Are the miners fighting for import controls?' (SW 639)

This question was asked by S. Cushion of London, within the context of *Socialist Worker's* opposition to import controls.

Yes, we are fighting for import controls, and by so doing we are taking action (not talking) to save jobs and to stop cheap profiteering.

There is no way that our action in blacking the 'Maria Lemos' will hurt union members in mines in the States.

Their problem is to organise the thousands of non-union men producing coal in the United States.

Selective import controls are practised by every country and to suggest that coal be transported 12,000 miles to put Welsh miners on the dole is to

THE revolutionary purity of some comrades is staggering.

They appear to think that unless a fight by workers is as pure as the driven snow then it cannot be supported.

What nonsense. You fight where the working class is. Not where you would like it to be.

The fact is that in South Wales we are facing a very real crisis. Our jobs and our industries are crashing around us.

The import of coking coal to British Steel workers makes a bad situation worse. If it goes ahead even the Coal Board estimates that six pits will close and nearly 6000 miners will lose their jobs. It will devastate whole communities.

So what do we do? Do we sit back on the sidelines and

this area against closures

to do otherwise would be

port.

You can't talk about revolutionary socialism to people who are not there. Militant trade unionists in South Wales are not in the SWP. They are at the docks and that is where we must be.

□ CERI JONES, South Wales.

THE RHONDDA VALLEY... Welsh miners are taking militant action to save their jobs and their communities—can we stand back on grounds that all import controls are wrong?

Socialist Worker

Socialist Worker, PO Box 82, London E2 9DS. Phones: 01-739 9043 (editorial) 01-739 2639 (circulation)

SWP says yes to the bureaucrats' schemes to save British capitalism

often boarded coaches laid on for them by the mill owners and gone to Westminster to protest that textile imports from the Far East were bad for their industry. How were they to counter the bosses' charges that their resistance to fully automated looms was bad for their industry too? Again, shop stewards at British Leyland have taken in lecture after lecture from management on the evils Volkswagens, Datsuns and Renaults have caused the country's carmakers. How were they to reject the idea that 'overmanning' is another evil that needs remedying too? In every case labour movement support for import controls has led to disaster.

Today no major industrial struggle in Britain passes without unions raising the call for import controls. Chauvinist attacks on 'the Germans' and 'the Japanese' fill the pages of *Tribune* and the *Morning Star*. In these circumstances class-conscious workers have a duty to expose the call for import controls for what it is – a reactionary summons to save British capitalism. As the recession gets worse the pressure to adopt protectionism wholesale will become more telling. The SWP's current efforts to reconcile support for controls on the importation of coking coal with internationalism should stand as a warning to us all.

SWP gets the nationalist Message

The SWP's rank and file miners' leader Bill Message contended in the 'industrial discussion' section of the party's monthly magazine that Welsh miners were right to demand an end to imports of coal:

'There is a direct link between the Coal Board aim to close pits in South Wales and the import of coking coal; it intends to cut its South Wales losses while making profits out of strip-mined (open-cast) coal in Australia'. ('Imports: an exception for coal', *Socialist Review*, February 1980)

What Message forgets is that the bosses are *always* prepared to export capital to more lucrative investment sites abroad and import the products of their foreign subsidiaries back home. This is as true of coal as it is of any other commodity. And it's no good for him to shrug off the fear that import controls would export unemployment to Australian mines with the observation that 'very few workers are involved' in them. That is the way that efficient foreign enterprises always appear to British eyes. Perhaps Message would care to have an 'industrial discussion' with a 'very few' Australian miners to get to learn how they feel about his call to keep their coal out of Britain.

All Message's talk of 'direct links', of an 'exception' for coal is just window-dressing. British factory workers heard arguments like Message's 75 years ago. They were told,

'The manufacturer may save himself – he may invest his capital abroad where profits are higher. But it is not for him that I am chiefly concerned, it is for you – the workers .... You cannot live on your investments in a foreign country. You live on the labour of your hands and if that labour is taken from you, you have no resources ....'

Who made this eloquent plea for import controls? None other than arch-imperialist Joseph Chamberlain. This is the historic company that Message and the SWP now keep.

The future

Active workers have a big job on their hands in the battle against protectionism. Labour bureaucrats will cynically exploit the fear of unemployment for chauvinist ends. Radical left groups like the SWP will simply swim with the tide of economic nationalism. But the struggle has to be started now. Otherwise workers will end up fighting each other instead of the ruling class.

Helen Swift

A general strike to beat the Tories?

Today's call for a general strike is simply the most militant trade union demand the radical left can come up with. But general strikes are about much more than being militant. Talk of a general strike at a time when no revolutionary vanguard exists isn't just foolish; it hands the initiative over to the labour bureaucracy.



1926: troops guard a food truck

NO RETURN TO LABOUR!

SINCE THE TORIES took power last May the class struggle in Britain has gathered momentum. Important sections of the labour movement – particularly the engineers and the steelworkers – have given militant replies to the bourgeois offensive.

One response to the raised tempo of class conflict is the call for a general strike. Several organisations on the radical left have come up with this and even Militant, a reformist outfit, has been murmuring about a '24 hour' general strike. How appropriate is the call for a general strike given the political state of the British working class today?

What sort of general strike?

When workers encounter the bosses they do so as workers in a particular factory, industry or branch of the public sector. They enter disputes 'on their own' – separate from the rest of the working class. More than that, they find themselves divided within their own ranks: divided as men and women, as whites and blacks, and as skilled and unskilled workers. These divisions help the bourgeoisie to isolate workers' struggles.

Sometimes workers in particular industries conduct very aggressive actions. But so long as their consciousness is a sectional one they remain unable to confront the capitalists as a class. What does this mean? Simply, that *socialists can only call for a general strike when tens of thousands of workers have overcome the sectional divisions that dominate the labour movement.*

This can only occur in special conditions. In the past these have been of two different kinds. Sometimes the very scale of the employers' offensive has forced workers to unite. On other occasions a strong and conscious leadership has united workers around independent working class politics.

British workers held a general strike in 1926 because they had little choice. The capitalists were cutting their wages and locking them out in their millions. But the General Strike was defeated, and for reasons which should be remembered. Because it was largely achieved as a spontaneous reaction to the bosses' attacks, the unity British workers won in 1926 was only temporary. The strikers were subjected to repeated hammer blows from the police, the army, the judiciary and the press. Workers' unity was undermined by the divisive policies of the Labour Party and trade union bureaucrats; it soon collapsed.

Things were different when the Bolsheviks centralised the Russian proletariat's resistance to the Kerensky Government of 1917. They led each group of workers to a clear, revolutionary understanding of the interests it shared with every other group. And they led the whole working class to identify with the struggles of those subjected to political oppression by the bourgeoisie – the national minorities and women. The result was that workers moved decisively from a mass strike to the overthrow of the capitalist state.

Preparing for power

General strikes are not simply wider versions of ordinary industrial disputes. As Trotsky observed, they are only possible 'when the class struggle rises above particular and craft demands, and extends over all occupational and district divisions, and wipes away the lines ... between legality and illegality, and mobilises the majority of the proletariat in an active opposition to the bourgeoisie and the state' (*Whither France?*, 1936).

Of necessity a general strike disrupts the norms and habits of everyday life and flings the economy into chaos. More than that, it throws up new organs of workers' power – factory committees, locally-based councils of action or soviets – whose existence is incompatible with the continuation of capitalist rule. Thus 'whatever may be the slogans and the motive for which the general strike is initiated, if it includes the genuine masses, and if these masses are quite resolved to struggle, the general strike inevitably poses before all the classes in the nation the question: *'Who will be the master of the house?'* (*Whither France?*).

Faced with such a question the employers will stop at nothing to regain their control over society. For its part, the working class has no alternative but to consolidate its position, move forward and destroy the capitalists' institutions (Parliament, the courts, the police and so on) once and for all. Otherwise the organisations of the working class will be destroyed. The defeat of the 1926 General Strike, for instance, was one of historic proportions. This setback paved the way for the mass unemployment and poverty of the 'thirties. It also demoralised the labour movement for more than a decade and made Marxism foreign to the trade unions for even longer. For this reason a general strike can never be an end in itself, a short, sharp skirmish with or rebuke for a distasteful government. A general strike must be a prelude to a sustained assault on the capitalist system in its entirety. As Trotsky noted, it is only one step from a general strike to armed insurrection.

The call for a general strike only makes sense if workers have a real chance of seriously weakening the bourgeoisie and of going straight on to the exercise of class rule. Trotsky: 'A real victory for the General Strike lies only in the winning of power by the proletariat and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat' (*Writings on Britain*, 1925). If the working class is unready for the seizure of power, if it enters the strike purely spontaneously and is not given a clear direction – then defeat is inevitable.

The victory of a general strike can of course never be guaranteed. Indeed, the terms 'victory' and 'defeat' are themselves not adequate to describe the outcome of a general strike. For instance, though the strikes which convulsed the whole of Russia in 1905 were defeated, the existence of a strong revolutionary leadership ensured that the workers' movement drew lessons from them which proved to be invaluable in 1917. The triumph of Russian reaction after 1905 did not prevent the Bolsheviks from using the experience of that year to strengthen the influence of Marxism in the working class. But either way, the call for a general strike cannot be made lightly.

Why the slogan's wrong for now

'The entire history of the working class movement proves that every general strike, whatever may be the slogans under which it occurs, has an internal tendency to transform itself into an open revolutionary clash, into a direct struggle for power. In other words: the general strike is not possible except under the conditions of extreme political tension, and that is why it is always the incontestable expression of the revolutionary character of the situation.' (Trotsky, *Whither France?*)

Socialists don't need brilliant powers of observation to see that the preconditions for a successful general strike have yet to emerge in Britain. Where is the 'extreme political tension'? Where is the 'revolutionary situation'? Just asking these questions brings out the absurdity of the call for a general strike.

Every major industrial dispute in Britain today reveals the persistence of sectionalism and the absence of a revolutionary leadership. Even in South Wales, where trade unionists showed remarkable solidarity with the steelworkers, divisions along industrial lines continue to plague the movement. While dockers took action to stop the movement of steel through local ports, the Welsh miners voted overwhelmingly not to strike in defence of their brothers at BSC.

Militants remain attracted to bourgeois solutions to the crisis, such as import controls and withdrawal from the EEC. In these circumstances, where the basic groundwork still has to be done, talk of a general strike is just hot air.

Doing that groundwork means building a revolutionary leadership in the working class: a group of workers who are not just militant but who are committed to fighting capitalism. This leadership would stand out against the nationalist politics of the labour bureaucracy and support the struggle of the Irish liberation movement and all the oppressed against the British state. Without such a vanguard the working class will pose little threat to the bosses.

The defeat of the steel strike shows the vulnerability of the most determined trade union militancy in the absence of a revolutionary vanguard. A number of steelworker militants called for a general strike at the height of their three month battle. Because they were forced to pursue their struggle in isolation from important trade unions they concluded that they needed the backing of the whole working class. This showed their will to fight the Government all the way. But to win they needed to convince the mass of steelworkers to oppose all redundancies. They

continued on page 6

...general strike?

continued from page 5



needed to break the membership of their union from its concern with the future viability of British Steel Corporation. In short they needed a political alternative to the national-reformist strategy of their leaders.

The pickets who raised the slogan of a general strike ignored the serious political problems facing all steelworkers. When the radical left points to angry pickets as confirmation of its views it simply admits its refusal to struggle against reformist politics. Despite the fact that the call for a general strike bears no relationship to the needs of the labour movement the International Marxist Group, Workers Power, the Spartacist League, Workers Action and the Workers Socialist League have all raised this demand. All it does is reveal their desire to latch on to the frustrations felt by workers in the heat of the struggle.

More than a big wage claim

It is indicative of the ideological level of the radical left that it doesn't even bother to provide an analysis of the balance of class forces to justify its call for a general strike. It doesn't argue that the class struggle has now entered a pre-revolutionary phase. Instead it goes on about the need for a 'political response' to the Conservative assault. This is how the IMG puts it:

'The TUC General Council was set up to *lead* – not sit about on the sidelines complaining how unfair the Tories are. That is why union branches, trades councils, etc. should be passing resolutions now demanding that the TUC organise a general strike.' (*Socialist Challenge*, 14 February 1980)

'That is why', says *Socialist Challenge* – with plenty of conviction. Because the General Council 'was set up to lead', workers should call on it to call a general strike. There the matter ends. Why workers should make this demand now and not five, ten or fifteen years ago, why they should look to the TUC and not to some other agency – all this is never explained.

Or take Workers Power. Asking what should be done about Thatcher's attacks, it adopts the IMG's method of persuasion:

'Our answer must be – a class offensive against us is political. We will use our strongest weapon, the mobilisation of the whole working class in a general strike.' (*Workers Power*, February 1980)

Now of course the Tories' offensive against us is 'political'. A class offensive is *always* political. So why should we use our 'strongest weapon' now? Because, says Workers Power, 'a class offensive against us is political'. Brilliant!

The radical left simply thinks 'wouldn't it be good if there was a general strike?'. The Spartacist League is particularly honest about this kind of day-dreaming. For it a general strike 'could pave the way to a pre-revolutionary situation – the most militant elements of the working class could be broken from the dead-end of reformism if presented with a revolutionary alternative' (*Spartacist Britain*, February 1980). Yes, comrades, anything is possible! No wonder that, when the Spartacists get to the end of their story and realise it has no consequences, they lamely conclude 'Above all, the working class desperately needs a mass revolutionary workers party, based firmly on the programme of Trotskyism, to lead the struggle for a workers' government'.

The groups on the radical left just see a general strike as a bigger, more militant type of ordinary strike – as 'our strongest weapon'. Instead of relating it to *revolution*, they want it to achieve trade union demands. The IMG sees it as a handy way of 'getting things together': 'What is needed is the generalisation of all the partial struggles – for more pay, against the cuts, against unemployment into one mighty movement to throw out the Tories: a general strike' (*Socialist Challenge*, 6 March 1980). Likewise, Workers Power wants it held around the slogans 'Reverse the cuts', 'No closures', 'No redundancies', 'Kill the anti-union Employment Bill'. Striking a high moral tone, the Spartacists say a general strike is necessary 'to carry the steel strikers who have fought so long and hard forward to a victory'. And, always bent on being distinctive, Workers Action suggests that a general strike 'could at the very least force the Tories to change course on trade union laws, on closures, on cuts or on all of these policies' (*Why we need a general strike*, March 1980).

These attempts to degrade the general strike to the status of a trade union tactic are nothing more than radical phrase-mongering. Trotsky maintained that once people called for such a strike they had to 'continue to pose before the proletariat the task of the revolutionary conquest of power'. If they couldn't do this, they had a duty not to 'venture to speak' of it (*Whither France?*). A general strike is no way to get quick results. As Trotsky remarked in 1926:

'In view of the insolvency of British capitalism, the General Strike is less able than at any other time to be made a vehicle of reforms or partial gains. To be more precise, even if the mine-owners or the government were to make this or that economic concession under pressure of the strike, such concession could not, by virtue of the whole situation, be of a profound, still less of a lasting significance.' (*Writings on Britain*)



Scargill's left talk won't win state power

Behind the postures – Labourism

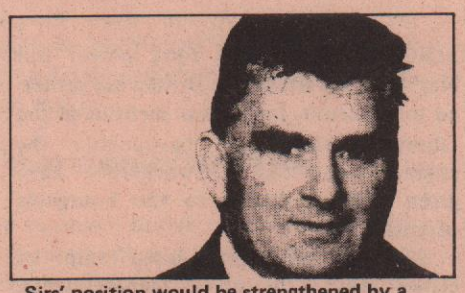
Sometimes the radical left remembers the Bolshevik classics and makes ritual references to the general strike posing the question of power. Yet, when we examine them, we find that its arguments contain a lot of posing but very little power. 'If', says the IMG, 'the question of power – of who runs society – is posed, that immediately raises the question of government' (*Socialist Challenge*, 14 February 1980). How? It's simple. For the IMG preparing for a general strike and the posing of the question of power means

'preparing a movement with the clear objective of kicking out the Tory government that is responsible for this offensive against workers' rights. We call for its replacement by a Labour government'. (*Socialist Challenge*, 14 February 1980)

Forget about smashing the state – workers' power turns out to be another miserable Labour government!

The Workers Socialist League won't have anything to do with the flabby reformism of the IMG. It doesn't want any old Labour government back in: it wants a left-wing one. 'Kick out Callaghan-Healey: demand Labour carry out socialist policies' says the WSL. Of course, the Spartacists and Workers Power go further. They warn against creating illusions in the Labour Party – but fail to mention how their call for a general strike avoids this. They don't say who will lead the general strike, or who will replace the Tories if they are 'kicked out'.

The radical left's chants about a 'workers' government' are merely euphemisms for a Labour government. Its calls for a general strike are just attempts to give anti-Tory sentiment a cutting edge. The left neglects the fight against the reformists and prefers to concentrate workers' energies on the obvious villains – Thatcher, Joseph, Howe and their colleagues. It asks the same Labour politicians who have betrayed workers' interests in the past and who continually undermine workers' struggles in the present to have another go. 'You show the way', says the radical left to the Labour Party, 'we'll follow'.



Sirs' position would be strengthened by a general strike today

Indeed, the Spartacists imagine that a general strike would resolve the steelworkers' difficulties 'even under a non-revolutionary leadership' (*Spartacist Britain*, February 1980). That's right, leave it to Transport House.

True confessions

When caught in a corner, many individuals on the radical left will agree that the call for a general strike is just a bit of bravado. 'But at least it will put the reformist leadership on the spot', they feebly assert. The Spartacists argue in this vein that

'given the pack of class traitors who currently are at the head of the labour movement, and the lack of a mass revolutionary alternative, it is clear that a general strike today could not lead directly to the workers' seizure of power. But it could succeed in achieving limited aims, and thereby open the road to a pre-revolutionary situation, as the reformists are clearly exposed as lackeys of the capitalists and as the most militant strikers come to recognise the need for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.' (*Spartacist Britain*, supplement, 15 February 1980)

A nice scenario. But who is going to expose the class traitors and how? The experience of the last Labour Government shows that it takes more than resounding declarations to expose the reformists who dominate the workers' movement today. It takes a working class vanguard to do that. It is not that there is no 'mass revolutionary alternative'. There's no revolutionary alternative that is *politically credible* in the eyes of the workers. Our job is to make one – by conducting a relentless struggle against the Labour Party.

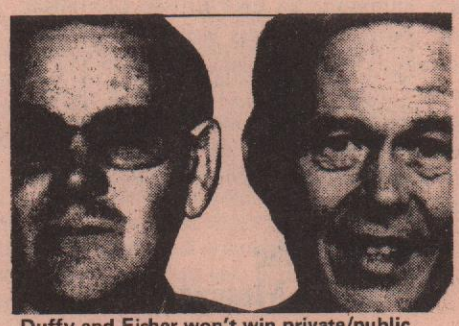
Playing with fire

'There are conditions under which a general strike may weaken the workers more than their immediate enemy. The strike must be an important element in the calculation of strategy and not a panacea in which is submerged all other strategy.' (Trotsky, *The struggle against fascism in Germany*, 1932)

Today, the call for a general strike is irresponsible. The general strike is an advanced form of struggle: 'Nothing can be on a higher plane than the general strike, except the armed insurrection' (*Whither France?*). The British working class will have to go through considerable preparation before there can be any serious talk of a general strike – otherwise the labour bureaucracy will have no problem sending such a strike to disaster.

At least the British ruling class understands what a general strike is all about. As an editorial in its favourite paper noted recently, 'a general strike is essentially a revolutionary gesture' (*The Times*, 30 January 1980). They will field all their forces to crush a general strike when it comes. And in its own unconscious way, the radical left knows this. It wants a general strike, but one with modest objectives – the realisation of trade union demands, or the installation of a Labour government. Yet as far as the employers are concerned a general strike is a general strike. If the radical left managed to summon the working class to its own little general strike the ruling class would still try to beat the Labour movement into the ground. And they would succeed too. It's just as well that the radical left has little hearing among trade unionists and that its calls for a general strike are seen for what they are: bombast.

The call for a general strike is not only irresponsible: it is reactionary. Because only the TUC could lead a general strike today, its practical consequence is to strengthen the labour bureaucracy's hold over the working class.



Duffy and Fisher won't win private/public sector unity

At present even the most active militants are unable to break out of the confines of Labourism. Marxism is needed for this. Without the unification of active militants around independent working class politics any mass struggle will only bring the most transient gains and will leave the political position of the bureaucrats unchallenged. The call for a general strike today is a call on active workers to join with passive ones and unite – against the Tories. This means a unity in which advanced workers remain tied to the pro-capitalist politics of the labour leadership; one in which narrow, sectional divisions will still disorientate the rank and file. This is not the sort of unity socialists want.

Time to fight today's battles

The call for a general strike reflects the ideological confusion of the radical left. Underneath all its rhetoric about a general strike lies elementary trade union militancy. The Socialist Workers Party at least makes this clear. It doesn't want a general strike: it wants '20 per cent and no strings', it wants to 'Smelt the Iron Lady'. Its role in life is to codify the slogans workers raised in the battles of the day before yesterday. More realistic than calling for a general strike, perhaps, but just as much an abdication from the struggle against reformist politics.

Revolutionary communists do not distinguish themselves merely by their objective and therefore realistic assessment of the balance of class forces today. Nor do they distinguish themselves by their desire to unite active workers against the existing leadership of the labour movement. What distinguishes them is their capacity to work towards the construction of a revolutionary leadership *consistently*. Today, the depth of the crisis is creating a clear political differentiation within the working class. While many workers are marking time, more and more active militants are beginning to question reformist politics. They should not be told 'go back to your mates and get them to return a Labour government'. They must be united against the Labour Party, both politically and organisationally. This is how a credible revolutionary alternative will emerge in Britain.

Frank Richards

For details of RCT public meetings on 'the crisis and the working class' see p11.

the next step THE TAMESIDE CONSPIRACY

Trades Council expelled from TUC for demanding

Bring the War to Britain!

Following a tip-off from the National Front, the labour bureaucrats have disaffiliated Tameside Trades Council from the TUC for planning a conference around the demands 'Support the Irish people: bring the war to Britain'. Below, we look at the events leading up to the disaffiliation. Overleaf, we expose the scurrilous manipulations of the Communist Party and discuss the role of the RCT in the Tameside conference. Lastly, we take the radical left to task for its adaptation to the labour bureaucracy over the Irish War and we show how student leaders have betrayed the struggle against the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

The Tameside affair has brought the pro-imperialist politics of the TUC, the Labour Party and the Communist Party out into the open. The struggle against British domination in Ireland is now an open fight against the leadership of the official labour movement in Britain. Through the Smash the PTA Campaign and through its other activities on Ireland the RCT has taken up that fight.

IN THE CLOSING WEEKS of 1979 Tameside Trades Council decided to organise a conference on Ireland and the British labour movement. The conference was to be held in Ashton-under-Lyne on 1 March 1980. But it didn't take place. The National Front found out about it and organised a protest demonstration, spreading the invention that the Irish National Liberation Army had been invited to speak. This was enough to push all the major political parties into action to sabotage the conference. The furore ended on 26 March with the TUC's disaffiliation of Tameside.

The ruling class panics

On the morning of 26 February the intrepid *Daily Mail* ran a story titled 'Fury over terrorist invite'. Within hours the hue and cry reached Parliament. Viscount Cranborne asked Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to condemn the Tameside conference and 'ban appearances of a terrorist organisation which was responsible for the murder of Airey Neave'.

Thatcher replied that she deplored the invitation of the INLA, that she believed that it was a proscribed organisation and that, if it was, 'the matter should be taken up formally with the Home Secretary' (*Hansard*, 26 February 1980). The Prime Minister was at a loss for facts about Ireland. Yet she was not alone in this.

Three days before, George Newton, Labour leader of Tameside Borough Council, confessed his ignorance too. Asked to comment on the Trades Council conference, he said: 'Who is this Irish Liberation Army (sic)? I don't know anything about them. Ireland's a subject I don't know a lot about' ('Row over terrorist group at talk-in', *Daily Mail*, 23 February 1980). But only two nights had to pass before Newton banned the conference from using council premises. In that time he'd learnt little about Ireland but all he needed to know about the Tameside conference: it opposed British imperialism and called for that opposition to be extended to Britain.

The TUC cracks down

The NF, the press, the Tory Government and a Labour council had all done their best to stop the conference. Now the local district committee of the AUEW turned down the conference organisers' request to use its hall as a new venue. Then, 36 hours before the conference was due to start, Congress House phoned Trades Council secretary Dave Hallsworth to threaten disaffiliation from the TUC if the conference went ahead.

Attacked on all sides, the Tameside executive committee decided to cancel the conference. However a few days later a full meeting of the Trades Council voted in favour of reconvening the conference at a future date. As far as the TUC was concerned that was the last straw. On 7 March, TUC trades council specialist John Monks wrote to Tameside to say he would be recommending disaffiliation to the TUC's Trades Councils Joint Consultative Committee meeting 10 days later.

When Tameside refused to back down Monks went ahead with his recommendation. The TUC Committee promptly gave the Trades Council a four-point ultimatum. It demanded that Tameside

* *disassociate* itself from the slogan 'Bring the war to Britain'
* *clear* the format, agenda and speakers for all future conferences on Ireland with the TUC
* *stick to* TUC policy at all times and *strictly observe* the TUC's model rules for trades councils
* *co-operate* with the local branch of the government's Manpower Services Commission.

The TUC's strictures about discussion on Ireland followed from its earlier ban on the Tameside conference. But why did the TUC insist that the Trades Council work with the Manpower Services Commission? Because the TUC wanted the Trades Council to 'co-operate' with the state – the same state it had so clearly refused to co-operate with over Ireland.

A stake in the state

The TUC sides with the *Daily Mail*, Viscount Cranborne and Margaret Thatcher on Ireland because it sides with the British state in its conduct of the Irish War. The labour bureaucracy sees the state as the main means of improving workers' position in society today. It wants the Manpower Services Commission to conjure up employment for workers out of thin air. It wants the Clegg Commission to give public sector workers a 'fair deal' on pay. the Department of Trade and Industry to protect British jobs at the expense of jobs abroad by introducing import controls. And it wants Westminster to do right by the Irish by bringing peace, jobs and progress to the Six Counties.

The labour bureaucracy's only quarrel with the Tories today is that they don't consult it enough on affairs of state. It wants to be recognised for the loyal servant it is. For the TUC the state that attacks striking workers on picket lines and condemns thousands of Irish nationalists to prison is basically OK. The state can win reforms; indeed, the state can win socialism itself.

The CP backs the bureaucracy

The labour leadership hates anti-imperialist politics on Ireland just as much as the ruling class because it knows that such politics represent a direct challenge to the British state. Ireland can only stay divided and the sectarian Six Counties regime stay intact if the British army crushes the liberation movement in Ireland. The United Kingdom can only remain united and the labour bureaucracy continue to do its business in stable conditions if support for Irish freedom is quelled here.

It is because the issue of Ireland is such a mortal danger to British capitalism that it is placed 'above party politics'. The Labour Party has little to dispute with the Tories about Ireland. Labour spokesman on Ireland Brynmor John shows he knows what the score is when he observes that a troops out campaign 'could cause violence' in Britain. John acknowledges that an anti-imperialist movement would threaten the stability of capitalist rule in Britain. The Labour Party will do its best to prevent this by curtailing anti-imperialist activity in the labour movement.

The Tameside conspiracy was not simply the work of the Labour Party. As we show below, it was the Stalinists who whipped up the local trade union bureaucracy against the conference. Communist Party members in Manchester and on the TUC's Trades Councils Committee coordinated the witch-hunt against Tameside Trades Council.

Only a rehearsal

Tameside tells us two things. (1) Whenever workers organise in a way that is *politically independent* of the labour bureaucracy, out come bans and proscriptions. The moment their arguments fail to convince, the labour leaders dispense with the 'Yours fraternally' and police the workers' movement on behalf of the bosses. (2) The Irish War has only to begin to become a real topic for debate among workers for the bureaucrats to start losing their grip. To rally support for the Irish people is to rally opposition to the British state – and against the pernicious politics of Labourism. It is to commence the class struggle in deadly earnest.

A meeting of minds...

Labour Party

'The organisers have . . . put out disgusting leaflets.

'They call for support for the Irish people to bring the war to Britain, claim that the Army intimidate, torture and kill the Irish and urge working class people over here to fight to bring down the state.

'We take great exception to all these statements and want to disassociate ourselves completely from this conference.'

Labour leader of Tameside Council George Newton, **Manchester Evening News**, 25 February 1980

National Front

'We have enough supporters – new and old – who are appalled at their pro-IRA stance and their pledge to bring the war to Britain.

'This is democracy gone amok. How any nation can sit back and let people talk about bombings and murders amazes me.

'Councillors are sitting back, or were doing before the publicity, but we are prepared to do something about it.'

Local NF organiser Frank Dawber, **Ashton-under-Lyne Reporter**, 29 February 1980

THE TAMESIDE CONSPIRACY

The NF proposes - the CP disposes

THE NATIONAL FRONT is not a major threat to the working class at present. But it has managed to throw the labour bureaucracy on the defensive. In the late 'seventies the growing electoral appeal of the NF's racist propaganda forced Labour Party leaders to take up racism as a party political issue for the first time.

Labour politicians denounced the NF as a 'cancer on our democratic society', as 'Nazi' and distinctly un-British. In other words they played on exactly those nationalist sentiments that the NF itself uses to promote *National Front News* and *Spearhead*. And, just to ram home their commitment to the British nation, Labour Ministers introduced tighter immigration controls and made sure the police dealt with events like the Notting Hill Carnival and the Southall anti-NF demo with ruthless repression. By the end of its term of office Labour had made racism respectable. Labour had stolen many of the NF's clothes and reinforced chauvinism in the labour movement.

The fascists stir things up

The rabid anti-Irish views of the NF are well known. NF 'smash the IRA – hang the terrorists' demonstrations have been held in several of Britain's major cities. The NF mounted a well publicised counter-demo when this year's Bloody Sunday commemoration march passed through the streets of Birmingham in January. But what is not so well known about the NF is the anti-Irish activity it conducts in the labour movement. In recent months fascists have waged important campaigns against Irish trade union solidarity work in both Oxford and Tameside. And in the process they have shown that the labour bureaucracy is as defensive on Ireland as it is on racism.

The sequence runs like this: the left plans or participates in opposition to the Irish War. The fascists declare their patriotic outrage and organise a protest. Thus alerted to affairs, the bureaucrats learn to their horror that certain active trade unionists support 'terrorism'. They therefore proceed to subject them to public vilification and quickly curb their activities by resort to the rule book.

In practice there's a very effective mechanism at work. The fascists act as a trigger; then the bureaucrats swiftly attempt to end whatever dissent on Ireland has broken out. But the lynchpin of the whole apparatus is the Communist Party.

The Stalinists do the dirty work

The CP is well entrenched in the trade union bureaucracy at local level. It is thus well placed to act on the accusations of the far right. CP members add a bit of extra snooping, inform on people to the TUC, and – often with the TUC's blessing – do the day-to-day hatchet jobs.

At Oxford the CP could handle things on its own. At Tameside it had to call in the top brass to back up its local manoeuvres.

Last October a number of trade union branches in the Oxford area took part in a Sinn Fein 'Troops Out' demonstration there. The TGWU was one of them. Now, among the TGWU participants were members of Alan Thornett's Workers Socialist League who happened to be standing against the CP in shop stewards' elections at British Leyland's local plant at Cowley. So, when the CP got to hear about who was on the demo – through the efforts of some Oxford fascists – it saw its chance.

At the December meeting of the Oxford district committee of the TGWU, CP member Tony Gallagher moved a motion disassociating that body from the demonstration. Afterwards he put out a leaflet alleging that two WSL shop stewards candidates were supporters of the Provisional IRA. Still, despite their failure to tackle the CP's pro-imperialist manoeuvres head on, the WSL members won the branch elections.

The CP took the initiative just as decisively at Tameside once the NF tipped it off. The CP-dominated executive committee of nearby Manchester Trades Council denounced the conference. CP member Frances Dean persuaded the Trades Council to write to Congress House and ask the TUC to take action against Tameside. Not surprisingly, the TUC took Manchester's arguments very seriously. After all, Frances Dean was a member of the TUC's Trades Councils Joint Consultative Committee.

The CP didn't simply work behind the scenes. It joined the media chorus against Tameside. The *Morning Star* tried to hide the CP's hostility to Irish republicans behind an innocent wish to hear loyalist trade unionists. 'Some Trades Council delegates', it said, claimed 'they were led to believe that the conference was to be addressed by representatives of the Northern Ireland trade union movement'. It went on that they were 'also angry' that the arrangements for the conference 'were left in the hands of a group of students from Manchester who, it turns out, belong to the Revolutionary Communist Trend (sic)' (*Morning Star*, 4 March 1980). A falsification of history worthy of Stalin himself!

FACT a full list of speakers to the conference was printed on a leaflet which was distributed to all Trades Council members one month before the conference

FACT the conference was organised by a committee which included Trades Council members and representatives of the Socialist Workers Party

FACT RCT representatives on the organising committee included a NUPE shop steward and a TGWU branch chairman.

Why the CP scabs

The CP always refuses to call for the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Ireland because of the 'complexity' of the situation there. But, complex or not, Ireland always drives the CP to simple political prescriptions. These are exactly the same as the TUC's: Parliament should pour more money into the Six Counties, it should bring in measures to 'let the Catholics have more of a say' – and, above all, it should stamp out the criminals and terrorists of the IRA.

Given that the CP and the TUC have so much in common on Ireland, it's not much of a puzzle why the CP worked so closely with Congress House on Tameside. But there's more to it than pro-imperialist persuasions. Today more than ever the CP can only hang on to its position as part of the trade union bureaucracy by giving the national leadership protection from rank and file unrest. That means it has to go out of its way to prove its worth to people like Len Murray. Tameside was its chance to make relations as cordial as could be.

Recently the CP's man on Tameside Trades Council, ASTMS delegate Frank Cropper, took to the columns of his local paper, the *Ashton-under-Lyne Reporter*. His object was to connect 'the strange political adventurism' indulged in by the Trades Council over Ireland with its behaviour on broader political questions. He argued that the Trades Council seemed 'hell-bent on its final destruction' in what he referred to as its 'anxiety' to oppose TUC policy.

Cropper was particularly incensed about the Trades Council's attitude to a motion he put to its March meeting – the same meeting that decided to reconvene the conference on Ireland. The motion called for a Trades Council campaign 'in respect of all manufactured products which threaten the existence of manufacturing industries based in this country, until the latter have been re-equipped and are able to compete on an equal footing with overseas competitors'. But the Trades Council added opposition to the CP's chauvinist call for import controls to its anti-imperialist stand on Ireland. Cropper, outraged at this persistent defiance of the TUC's patriotic policies, tried to rally local trade unionists against the Trades Council:

> 'I would appeal to all members of the local trade union movement who are concerned at what has been happening to check that their union branch is still affiliated to the trades council and that all their delegates are attending the monthly delegate meeting in future. Only thus will it be possible to end the present fools' progress of this totally unrepresentative body.' (21 March 1980)

This is how the Stalinists do the TUC's bidding these days. Workers start to turn against British imperialism's oppression of Ireland – the CP rushes in to silence them. Workers beg to differ with the bureaucracy's hopes of controlling imports and 're-equipping' British industry – the CP plays the right's game of calling active labour movement bodies 'unrepresentative'.

Just like the National Front, the CP puts Britain first. True, on Ireland it wants Westminster to bring a bit of socialism to the Irish – something the NF couldn't countenance. But otherwise it shares both the Front's patriotic premises and its call for the British state to exterminate the national liberation movement. And, inside the trade unions, it tries to isolate anti-imperialists by using many of the National Front's tactics: smears, intrigues and character assassination.

Alex Farrell

Conspiracy coun

20 February: National Front calls demonstrati conference on Ireland and the B

26 February: Press furore results in denunciati a Home Office inquiry.

26 February: Tameside Labour Council bans t on its premises.

29 February: TUC threatens Tameside Trade goes ahead. The Tameside execu

1 March: An open-air rally is held in place meeting votes to reconvene it at

7 March: TUC repeats threat of disaffiliati

17 March: TUC ultimatum – unless Tames from the TUC
- * public disassociation from th
- * no conferences on Ireland v and speakers.
- * participation in the County power Services Commission.
- * obedience at all times to offi

26 March: General Council of TUC withdra

Motion

This union/trades council notes:

The expulsion of Tameside Trades Council from the

This branch/trades council believes that:

1 The TUC's ban on the Tameside conference 'Ir proscription of the Trades Council is a bureaucra movement.

2 Tameside Trades Council should reconvene its originally planned: support for the right of the conference should declare its commitment to t Ireland and back the campaign against the Prever

This union branch/trades council resolves:

1 To send a letter of condemnation to the TUC General Council at this year's Trade Union Cong

2 To support a referral back of the General Counc the expulsion of Tameside and demanding its re- Councils (30 May to 1 June).

3 To call its own conference on Ireland around t war to Britain' and to inform the TUC of its soli

TRADES UNION CONGRES

CONGRESS HOUSE · GREAT RUSSELL STREET · LONDON WCI

Telephone 01-636 4030 Telegrams TRADUNIC LONDON WC1

Mr D Hallsworth
Tameside Trades Union Council

YOUR REFEREN
OUR REFERENC
DEPARTMENT
Industrial

February

Dear Mr Hallsworth

Functioning of Trades Council

The TUC has been informed that your Council is a Conference on Ireland and we have received c the circulars and conference details which you sent out.

If this Conference takes place I shall recommen the next meeting of the Trades Councils Joint C Committee that recognition for your Trades Cou TUC be withdrawn. I hope even at this late sta realise that the TUC cannot be associated with as 'Bring the War to Britain'.

Yours sincerely

John Monks

J Monks
Secretary
Organisation and Industrial Relations Departmen

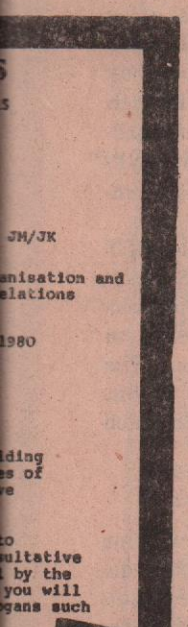
GENERAL SECRETARY: RT. HON. LIONEL MURRAY OBE DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY: HO
ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARIES: KENNETH GRAHAM OBE AND DAVID LEA OB

...continued

down

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dayschool
Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign
THE TAMESIDE CONSPIRACY
Support the Irish War
Support Tameside Trades Council
Bring the war to Britain
Speakers: Keith Tompson, Frank Richards
Saturday 3 May 10am-5pm
For details write to the RCT at:
Box 33, 164/166 Corn Exchange Building
Hanging Ditch, Manchester M4 3BD

Revolutionary Communists say

NO EQUIVOCATION!

THE Revolutionary Communist Tendency helped initiate and organise the Tameside conference. Speakers from the RCT's Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign were invited to speak at the conference. Once the press got wind of the RCT's involvement it began to couple hysteria about 'terrorists' with an anti-communist scare.

TUC joins witch-hunt

Under the headline 'We set up meeting for the terrorists, say reds', the *Daily Mail* declared that the RCT was 'using trade union organisations as a front for a talk-in by supporters of Irish terror groups' (28 February 1980). Although this story was contradicted in the *Manchester Evening News* later the same day – 'Reds not behind terror talk' – the witch-hunt had begun.

As the TUC bureaucrats stepped up the pressure to get the conference abandoned they gave the *Daily Mail* to understand that they would only continue to recognise the Trades Council if it ended its association with the RCT. According to the *Mail* the TUC chiefs ordered the Trades Council 'to sever its links with the Revolutionary Communist Tendency which worked behind the scenes to provide militant Republican speakers' ('Unions defy ban on terror talk-in', 18 March 1980). The TUC is always ready to join in with the red-baiting of the gutter press if it can strengthen its control over rank and file trade unionists that way.

When it comes to defending the interests of the working class the labour bureaucracy is renowned for its lethargy and its procrastination. It takes the TUC *months* to organise a demonstration – whether it's against the cuts or anti-union laws. Throughout the three months of the steel strike Congress House organised no solidarity action to beat the employers. Not for nothing does the old cartoon depict the TUC as a tired, superannuated carthorse.

But when it comes to dealing with anti-imperialist politics in the labour movement the TUC puts on an astonishing burst of speed. Tameside was enough to throw it into a flurry of urgent meetings, hurried notes, furtive late night telephone conversations and short-term ultimatums. The Tameside conspiracy was a whirlwind affair: less than 28 days elapsed between the TUC's first intervention and the final expulsion of the Trades Council.

Why the TUC got so upset

What was it about Tameside that galvanised the TUC into action? It wasn't simply that the conference was about Ireland: there have been many trades council discussions on that subject over the last 10 years. In 1975 the Greater London Association of Trades Councils sent a deputation to the Six Counties which visited the major trouble spots there and interviewed trade unionists and republicans. In recent months Newcastle, Tower Hamlets and Battersea & Wandsworth trades councils have all held conferences on Ireland. Yet none of these trades councils have been proscribed by the TUC.

Why not? Because they didn't come out in explicit opposition to the British state, they didn't openly condemn official Congress policy and they didn't provide a platform for representatives of the republican movement. Rather, they either failed to dismiss or wholly endorsed the TUC's pro-imperialist call for a Westminster-imposed Bill of Rights for the Six Counties. Similarly, they either failed to decry or backed the labour bureaucracy's Better Life for All Campaign – an appeal to the British state to improve housing conditions and living standards in its occupied territories in Ireland.

But the Tameside conference was different. It explicitly rejected the labour bureaucracy's apologies for British imperialism. Tameside didn't ask the Government to go a bit easier on the Irish. On the contrary, it demanded that the Government leave Ireland alone. It called for the immediate withdrawal of British troops and self-determination for the Irish people. It called for prisoner of war status for Irish political prisoners and for the smashing of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. *That* was why the TUC found the conference beyond the pale – and why the RCT backed it all the way.

Yes, bring the war to Britain!

But the TUC wasn't exceptional in its reaction to the conference. *Workers Action*, a radical paper that hasn't hesitated to castigate the TUC for its failure to call a general strike in recent months, was also appalled by it (see page 10). In each case it was the slogan 'support the Irish people: bring the war to Britain' that caused uproar.

The RCT defends this slogan wholeheartedly. The history of Irish solidarity work in Britain – from the Anti-Internment League of the early 'seventies to the Troops Out Movement and *Hands Off Ireland* today – has shown that the radical left's sympathy for the victims of British oppression in Ireland is not enough. What has become of Amnesty International's report on torture at Castlereagh interrogation centre? What has become of the Government's Bennett report on the same matter? By itself, exposure of 'the facts' of Britain's military occupation of the Six Counties achieves nothing. Indeed, moral disgust with the treatment the Irish receive at the hands of the army and the RUC can easily be turned into pleas that Britain rule the Six Counties more humanely – which is just what the labour bureaucracy wants.

The Irish deserve more than sympathy. They are at war with the British state. Socialists in this country owe it to them to open a second front against that state here. Today that means fighting the Prevention of Terrorism Act – and its adherents in the labour movement – with every means at our disposal. Tomorrow it will mean organising industrial action to stop the transport of troops, arms, computers and riot equipment to the Six Counties.

The British working class is already engaged in open battle against the employers. The steel strike confirms this vividly. But for this battle to become a conscious class struggle British workers need to widen their day to day struggles to include opposition to ruling class policy right across the board. That includes making the Irish War an issue in the British labour movement.

No bans or proscriptions!

The ruling class and the TUC moved heaven and earth to stop the Tameside conference. But we fought back, not in the name of 'free speech' or 'democracy', but on the issue which prompted the bans – support for the national liberation struggle in Ireland.

* On **1 March**, the day the conference was scheduled to take place, we helped stage an open-air rally in Ashton-under-Lyne. In defiance of the NF, the police and the labour bureaucracy, more than 100 people – including Trades Council members – listened to the speakers who would have addressed the conference had it taken place. On behalf of the RCT's Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign, Judith Harrison condemned the TUC ban and proclaimed unconditional support for Irish freedom
* On **17 March**, the day the TUC set for Tameside's expulsion, we mounted a picket outside Congress House during the TUC Trades Council Joint Consultative Committee meeting. A small number of supporters occupied the TUC headquarters, disrupted the meeting and unfurled banners from the windows reading 'Stop TUC ban on Irish conference' and 'Troops Out Now'
* On **26 March**, within hours of the TUC's final decision to disaffiliate Tameside, we issued 2000 broadsheets containing the background to the move and a motion of support for the Trades Council's stand. Copies have been sent to trade unionists to put to branches and trades councils and – together with a covering note inquiring about their attitude to Manchester AUEW's refusal to allow Tameside to use its hall – to all AUEW district committees and candidates for the forthcoming AUEW elections.

But we didn't stop there. It was all too obvious that the TUC's strong-arm methods were merely a labour movement version of the PTA, that the CP was its own little police Anti-Terrorist Squad. The Smash the PTA Campaign therefore took the Tameside conspiracy up energetically. It made Tameside a feature of the nationwide speaking tour it had organised to coincide with the annual renewal of the PTA in Parliament.

The Campaign took news of the conference to anti-imperialists from Brighton to Aberdeen. By the time the TUC excommunicated Tameside the annual general meeting of Tower Hamlets Trades Council had heard speakers repudiate the bureaucracy and uphold Tameside's position. Other trades councils and union branches have subsequently passed motions to the same effect.

For us this is only the beginning. We intend to fight Tameside's disaffiliation all the way down the line – by winning labour movement support for anti-imperialist politics and labour movement opposition to TUC and Stalinist trickery. Help us. Raise Tameside in your workplace and union branch. Answer the bureaucracy's plots with a declaration of war.

Mick Kennedy

Tameside...

Workers Action backs Labour reaction

'ULTRA-LEFT'? - THANKS!

THE WEEKLY NEWSPAPER of the radical left group *Workers Action* criticised the TUC's intervention over Tameside. But when it came to the local Labour Council and the AUEW refusing to let rooms for the conference it took a different line. According to *Workers Action* the conference was banned not because of the pro-imperialist politics of the labour bureaucracy but because of 'a daft ultra-left leaflet entitled "Ireland: Bring the war back to Britain" written by members of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency' (*Workers Action*, 15 March 1980).

Like its sister paper *Militant*, *Workers Action* simply apologises for the labour bureaucracy. For *Workers Action* nothing could be more 'daft' than to allow anti-imperialist politics to disturb the tranquility of Labour Party wards.

Is the slogan 'Bring the war to Britain' ultra-left? Let us remind *Workers Action* of the traditional Bolshevik approach to the Irish question. This is how one of the leaders of Lenin's Communist International addressed British delegates at its second congress:

'We would point out to the British comrades that it is their duty to help the Irish movement with all their strength, that it is their duty to agitate among the British troops, that it is their duty to use all their resources to block the policy that the British transport and railway unions are at present pursuing of permitting troop transports to be shipped to Ireland.' (K Radek, speech to the second congress of the Communist International, 1920)

And this is how Trotsky saw the matter:

'the British socialist who fails to support by all possible means the uprisings in Ireland, Egypt and India against the London plutocracy – such a socialist deserves to be branded with infamy if not with a bullet.' (Manifesto of the second congress, 1920)

The RCT does not mind being branded as 'ultra-left' in the company of Radek and Trotsky. Obviously, *Workers Action* does; its supporters should re-examine its pretensions to Trotskyism. *Workers Action* may seem inoffensive to the average Labour Party official or trade union bureaucrat at the moment; but who can tell what might offend them in the future?

The SWP campaign against the PTA

NOW YOU SEE IT, NOW YOU DON'T

ONE INTERESTING aspect of the Smash the PTA Campaign is the way it has forced a number of left-wing organisations to take the PTA a bit more seriously. Even the SWP has had to shake some dust off its Irish files. Of course, it couldn't bring itself to work with the Smash the PTA Campaign. But, after five years of inactivity on the issue, it felt it had to do something. So it launched its own – its very own – 'End the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign'.

The EPTAC got off to a flying start with a picket of Paddington Green police station on 12 March. The Green didn't have any PTA detainees in its cells at the time but the SWP reckoned that a gesture was better than nothing. Because the picket was meant to run from 11am to 3pm two RCT supporters duly arrived at 11am, all prepared for four hours of protests against the police and the added bonus of discussion with members of the SWP. But the SWP was nowhere to be seen.

Things did begin to get going at 11.30, when four SWP members turned up. And, at noon, the SWP's ranks were swelled by a fifth comrade. But passers-by could be excused for ignoring the SWP pickets. They didn't bring any placards. They didn't shout any slogans. In fact, they called the picket off at 12.30.

The SWP's feeble opposition to the PTA is only a symptom of its general equivocation on the Irish War. In practice the SWP continually fails to defend the struggle of the Irish people against British imperialism. *Socialist Worker* Irish correspondent Mike Milotte made this clear in a recent article on the PTA. After pointing out the PTA's oppressive nature, Milotte congratulated MPs who voted against its renewal in March. He praised left-wing Labour MP Martin Flannery for making a 'courageous speech'. Did Flannery defend the liberation struggle? No. Did Flannery denounce British imperialism? No. What he said was this: 'The measure does not prevent terrorism, but it does prevent legitimate political activity and it gives carte blanche to anyone in uniform or not, to harass and terrorise innocent people' (*Hansard*, 4 March 1980). Flannery didn't say that those who are labelled as terrorists are in fact freedom fighters. He didn't pause to examine the Irish War and its importance for the British ruling class. All he opposed was the prevention of 'legitimate' political activity.

The Smash the PTA Campaign has consistently argued that Flannery's kind of civil rights opposition to the PTA is useless. For the issue that the PTA highlights is the Irish War, not civil rights. It is on the War that we must take sides before we can effectively oppose the PTA. So long as the SWP takes its lead from the 'courageous speeches' of reformist politicians, its anti-PTA activity will remain as ineffectual as the first picket of the EPTAC.

Glyn Cohen

NUS COPS OUT OVER PTA

THE EVENTS following last December's National Union of Students conference in Blackpool confirm its leadership's loyalty to British imperialism. No sooner had conference delegates managed to press the Tribune supporters and Stalinists who dominate the NUS executive into calling a demonstration against the Prevention of Terrorism Act than the back-tracking began.

As in previous years the Belfast delegation to the NUS conference was seized under the PTA on getting off the Irish ferry at Liverpool. In response to this RCT supporters and the North West Committee of the Smash the PTA Campaign called for an immediate picket of Liverpool's Bridewell police station. But the NUS executive preferred to rely on the good offices of Blackpool Tory Lord Mayor to free the Belfast students.

Soon enough, however, the incident was raised on the floor of the conference. A motion was passed which mandated the executive to call a demonstration against the PTA, organise a speaking tour on the Act and mobilise widely in the colleges against it. An RCT amendment to this, calling for immediate NUS action in reply to the arrests under the Act and for pickets of prisons holding Republican prisoners, was defeated.

The making of a non-demo

Moderate though it was, the successful motion was far too much for the NUS leadership. The last thing they wanted to do was back a struggle against the PTA. So they did as little as possible to build for the demonstration. They sent a poster and a leaflet round to colleges and called the demonstration for 20 February – nice and early, so nobody could prepare for it.

The 'literature' despatched from Endsleigh Street contained the most reactionary arguments against the PTA. The poster featured a photo of inoffensive-looking students and a headline asking 'which one is the terrorist?'. Its message: 'innocent' students – that is, students who do *not* support the national liberation struggle– sometimes get picked up under the PTA; therefore the PTA is a bad piece of legislation. As for the leaflet, its criticism of the PTA was that it 'actually encourages' terrorism.

These sly observations are what reformist politics are all about. *Because the reformists always ground their dissent from the PTA in firm opposition to 'terrorism' they ensure that their protests come to nothing.* How else can they stay respectable? Indeed, when Tory students put out a leaflet accusing the NUS executive of supporting the Irish in their struggle against Britain, NUS president Trevor Phillips dismissed it as a 'slur' (*The Guardian*, 8 February 1980).

Two ways to run a march

Having made clear its opposition to the Irish struggle for independence the NUS executive proceeded to do everything it could to sabotage the demonstration against the PTA. It banned 'political' banners and made sure no speakers were arranged. In the end, after phoning a dozen Labour/Communist Party-run student unions and finding – predictably – that they had done nothing, it called the whole thing off. Why? Because there were 'too many other demonstrations' around the time of 20 February.

By contrast, students from the Revolutionary Communist Societies and student supporters of SPTAC fought for a strong, militant demonstration and attacked the NUS leadership for its reactionary politics and organisational manoeuvres. SPTAC students produced a leaflet which called on students to march under banners carrying the demands Troops Out Now and Self-determination for the Irish people. They invited the students who had been detained under the PTA to speak at the march.

All together with Trevor Phillips

Told that the demonstration had been cancelled, SPTAC supporters contacted student unions all over the country to ask them to attend a meeting and a picket of the NUS offices in London. NUS executive members in the Socialist Workers Party and International Marxist Group felt obliged to attend, and the IMG's student organiser came along too. But what did they argue? *For* the NUS line of 'repealing' the PTA and *against* the only demand that places the PTA in the context of the war that prompted it – Troops Out Now. And why? Because, for a campaign on the PTA to be 'broad' it must be 'non-exclusive'. It mustn't, in short, put people off by something as unpopular as revolutionary politics. It must be tactically subtle: first it must get students on the streets, then it must convert their nagging doubts about the PTA into wholehearted anti-imperialism.

The radical left won't learn. Nobody who supports Britain's military occupation of Ireland will oppose an Act directed against 'terrorists'. Nobody can be cajoled to come on a march by cries that some students arrested under the PTA are honest British citizens. Still less can anybody be persuaded to reject honest British 'democracy' in Ireland when they are called out to uphold it in Britain. The SWP/IMG 'softly softly' approach isn't just unprincipled: *it doesn't work.*

At the 20 February meeting the RCT called for a picket of the NUS headquarters. We argued that, since the executive had sided with the bourgeoisie on the PTA, it needed to be exposed. The radical left declined to participate in this. Instead it held another meeting – to which nobody came.

No surrender!

Just as in the labour movement, winning students to anti-imperialist politics demands a challenge to their present bureaucratic leadership. The first step is for student unions to censure the NUS executive for its conduct over the PTA. Further, they can affiliate to the SPTAC and help make support for the Irish national liberation struggle a powerful force in the student movement.

We hope that student comrades in and around the SWP and IMG will work with us to achieve these ends. But only time will tell whether they sever their links with the out-and-out British patriots of the NUS executive.

Kate Marshall

Stop press: *A shamefaced NUS leadership has now announced a new date for its long awaited PTA demo – 7 May (1pm, Paddington Green). We'll be there – but will the empire loyalists from Endsleigh Street?*

RCT activities

MANCHESTER

Ashton-under-Lyne Council elections

Tameside Labour Party backs the National Front on Ireland
NO VOTE FOR LABOUR!

Assheton Arms Hotel,
Booth Street,
Ashton-under-Lyne
Thursday 24 April 1980
7.30pm
Speaker: **Keith Tompson**

The crisis and the working class

EAST LONDON

Fighting redundancies

Toynbee Hall,
Commercial Street, E1
Aldgate East tube
Tuesday 29 April, 1980, 7.30pm
Speaker: **Judith Harrison**

LONDON

Recession and redundancies
The politics we need to win

Conway Hall,
Red Lion Square, WC1
Holborn tube
Friday 9 May 1980, 7.30pm
Speaker: **Frank Richards**

WORKERS AND THE FIGHT FOR BLACK RIGHTS

Dayschool on racial oppression and the labour movement

1 On the dole, up against the police – and no help from the unions
2 The strange death of liberal anti-fascism

Speakers: **Fran Eden**
Frank Richards

Details:
21 June 1980
10am – 5pm, followed by social
All Nations Club
4 Martello Street
Hackney E8

For further information ring
01-274 3951

The debate goes on

Just because the Labour Party/radical left 'debate of the decade' turned out to be an irrelevant bore it doesn't mean that there are no important issues to debate. It simply shows that the Labour Party, the SWP and the IMG have nothing substantial to contribute to the important discussions of the day. How are we to defend steelworkers' jobs now the strike is over? What is the best way to take the fight for Irish freedom into the labour movement? How can we win trade union support for the rights of black people? These are the real and pressing questions and they demand clear answers.

the next step puts forward our approach to these issues. What's yours? Please write and say, remembering that shorter letters are the ones that are most likely to be published in full.
Address:
The editor
the next step
BM RCT
London WC1V 6XX

The cuts:

In the pages that follow we look at the cuts, the reformist response to them and the revolutionary communist alternative in three areas: social security, the white collar unions and housing.

'Fairer' won't do

FOR THE LAST five years the government has been determined to cut public expenditure. Tory Chancellor Geoffrey Howe's March budget was the latest round in the cycle of cuts that began when Denis Healey was Chancellor in the last Labour Government. Howe's cuts were brutal:

* housing and local authority employment hit by tighter cash limits
* social security benefits de-indexed
* strikers' families robbed of £12 per week
* prescription charges raised to £1.

One thing is clear: the Tories are only continuing with the dirty work Labour began in 1974. As Margaret Thatcher put it in a recent broadcast to the nation, 'almost everyone agrees on the need to cut public spending' – Labour included. The Labour Party gets upset over who gets cut, about how much they get cut and about how fast they get cut. But Labour has no differences with the Tories on their central goal of reducing state spending to revive British manufacturing industry.

The state steps in

The trouble is that British capitalism has had to rely on state intervention ever since the last war confirmed its position as a thoroughly second-rate imperialist power. After 1945 the state stepped in to support vital but unprofitable sectors like coal and steel. It also took over the provision of education, health care and unemployment benefit to ensure a highly trained, healthy and reasonably contented workforce. Britain needs more state intervention and higher government spending than many of its competitors because of the relative weakness of British capitalism.

By the time of the recession Britain had no choice but to embark on further state intervention. Helped by the National Enterprise Board, the government took a stake in some of the country's key product sectors – cars (Leyland), machine tools (Alfred Herbert), ships (British Shipbuilders) – to save them from collapse. It poured more money into the armed forces and the police too: after all, East-West detente was becoming strained, colonial responsibilities more onerous, and trade union militancy more aggressive. And, as unemployment shot up, it found itself laying out hundreds of millions more to keep people on the dole. The only hope of recovery for British private enterprise lay in North Sea oil and new technology – both developed with massive state assistance.

State expenditure on both nationalised industries and public services is mainly financed out of taxes on private sector profits. But the rate of profit in British industry is at an all-time low. Thus capitalists are faced with more demands on their money at precisely the time they can least afford to meet them.

It's easy to conclude from this that the bourgeoisie will plump for cuts all round. Easy, but wrong. Private firms need regional aid, export subsidies, resources to learn about silicon chips and so on: they don't want to see these go. That's why the CBI recently pleaded with Thatcher for 'no further cuts in the programmes of present assistance to trade and industry' (*The Times*, 15 January 1980). What the ruling class does want to save on is expenditure on services provided to working people.

The cuts begin

Wilson and Callaghan tried to lighten the burden of state spending by taxing workers harder and by borrowing. They failed. Workers just put in bigger pay claims to claw back what the Inland Revenue took away. And the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement hit £10 billion, so fuelling inflation and adding to financial instability. So the Labour Government turned to restraining state expenditure directly – by cutting the social services.

Labour began with the 'capital' rather than the 'current' part of public expenditure. It cancelled school, hospital and house building programmes by the dozen, and quickly and discreetly too. Attempts at outright closures did prompt protests; but the loss of 100 000 building workers' jobs between 1974 and 1977 caused little comment.

Labour cuts

Cuts in capital spending
(£m at 1978 prices)

	1974-75	1978-79	% cut
Education	**878**	**505**	**42**
NHS	**681**	**522**	**23**
Local authority housing	**2506**	**2065**	**18**

Source: Public expenditure White Paper February 1979

Labour's early economies proved insufficient. By 1976 Chancellor Denis Healey was compelled to introduce cash limits on central and local government spending. This meant that the money allocated to Whitehall departments and town halls was fixed. Increases in it were geared to a rate of inflation below the actual rate at which prices rose. As a consequence real state expenditure fell: in fact total government spending dropped by an unprecedented 10 per cent between 1975/76 and 1977/78.

Tory cuts

Public expenditure by programme
– capital and current spending –
(£m at 1979 survey figures)

	1979-80 Expected outturn	1980-81 Plans	% change
Defence	**7 824**	**8 062**	**+3**
Industry	**2 753**	**2 870**	**+4**
Housing	**5 380**	**5 078**	**–6**
Law and order	**2 454**	**2 542**	**+4**
Education	**9 657**	**9 246**	**–4**
Health and social services	**9 109**	**9 194**	**+1**
Social security	**19 058**	**19 289**	**+1**
Total programmes	**71 776**	**70 729**	**–1.5**

Source: The Government's expenditure plans, 1980-81

Yet still the crisis wouldn't go away. By 1979 Labour had cut capital spending so much that even the Tories were complaining about inadequate services. But Thatcher wasn't about to restore Labour's cuts – far from it. She merely turned the bourgeoisie's attention to the extra savings to be made from 'current' expenditure in general and manpower, salaries and benefits in particular.

The first Tory budget in June last year began a new onslaught on the public sector. Things went from bad to worse. Cash limits were used as a weapon to cut jobs and hold down wages in the civil service and local government. And the Tories launched the squeeze on social security that culminated in the recent budget.

Fighting the cuts

Why does the ruling class want these brutal cuts? Not out of malice or stupidity, not because Thatcher is a 'mad axewoman', but because the public purse is filled from private profits – and profitability is in decline. The bourgeoisie will stop at nothing, not because of its psychological make-up, but because the very future of its system is at stake.

The working class must likewise stop at nothing. *Every* cut must be fought. But the only way to fight them is to repudiate all talk that economies of some sort do need to be made.

Today the Labour Party is the means by which that talk is spread – in the unions and in the community. Labour decries the heartlessness of the 'Tory cuts' but accepts that cuts are necessary if Britain is to pay its way. When Labour environment spokesman Roy Hattersley attacked Michael Heseltine's housing cuts in Parliament in January he didn't fail to note that 'cash limits . . . were a necessary element of financial prudence in local government' (*The Times*, 17 January 1980). All he wanted was 'fairer' cuts and more 'consultation' about where they would fall. And it's the same story with the staunch Labourites of the TUC. Speaking to a union rally at Newcastle last winter, Len Murray told workers that the TUC and the Tories had to 'find a way of reaching agreement on how we get the right balance in the use of resources between our productive industries and the public services and how we get agreement on priorities in public spending' (*Financial Times*, 12 November 1979). For Hattersley the destruction of workers' jobs and living standards is a matter of 'financial prudence'; for Murray it's a question of 'balance', of 'priorities'. Both are convinced that cuts are essential.

The RCT says they are only essential *to the survival of capitalism as an exploitative system of production*. The public services are not productive in the sense that industry is *because they are not productive of profit* – the thing that capitalism relies on. Under socialism, a completely different system of production, the housing, health and training of the working class will be as central to the economy as oil, steel and electronics. And we will only get socialism once we refuse to listen to Labour's advice about 'prudence' and put workers' interests and needs first.

Social security benefits

In the past five years state spending on social security has grown by more than a third. Now almost 30 per cent of government expenditure goes on pensions, child benefit, supplementary benefit and payments to the unemployed and sick. But as British capitalism plunges into crisis it's the poor, the elderly and the infirm who are made to pay the price.

The welfare state swindle

IN 1975 THE last Labour Government passed a law to link the value of benefits to rises in prices or earnings – whichever was the higher. But soon enough Health Minister Barbara Castle managed to save the state £500m by indexing pensions to projections of future wage and price rises rather than to current real increases. The notorious 'November 1976 pension swindle' meant a rise of 15 per cent in benefits for Britain's old people instead of the 22 per cent they were entitled to.

When the Tories first came in they played Labour's trick in reverse. They geared the rise in benefits to the retail price index – which was, according to their statistics, lower than the increase in earnings. Now they want to abandon even that by allowing inflation to rip into allowances that are already at poverty-line levels.

Over to you, Mrs Thatcher

Margaret Thatcher explained the rationale for the Government's savage social security policies early in the New Year:

> 'People must not automatically expect to have their standard of living indexed to the retail price index. Your standard of living depends on what you earn not on where a retail price index is.' (*The Guardian*, 7 January 1980)

But who is the 'you' Thatcher is referring to? Most people who claim social security do so because they are unable to earn anything. And their standard of living depends on the retail price index just as much as a wage earner's does. Thatcher's arguments are simply attempts to justify ruthless cuts in welfare spending. Tampering with indexation is one of the easiest ways to reduce welfare costs.

But the tricks the Tories have learned from Labour don't just stop here. They've copied Labour's plans for taxing unemployment and short-term benefits too. Still, the Tories are introducing some genuine innovations. They're going to follow up their election pledge to reduce payments to strikers' families so that it's 'the unions, not the taxpayers who suffer the hardship from strikes' (*Financial Times*, 15 February 1980). They've shifted the burden of sickness benefit from the DHSS to the employer so that even more sick pay will go unclaimed than at present. And they've raised school meal and transport charges, frozen child benefits, reduced allowances to the disabled and ensured that social security payments are now made fortnightly.

The squeeze on the dole

Although unemployment benefit accounts for less than four per cent of social security spending it is a major target for government attack. There are two reasons for this.

First, the number of people out of work is expected to hit two million this year – and longer dole queues mean more government money. For instance, *The Guardian* calculates that 'if unemployment rises to 1.9 million by this summer, public expenditure on unemployment benefits will increase by £400m next year' (15 October 1979). (There are now many people on the dole – especially school leavers – who are forced to claim supplementary benefit because they aren't eligible for unemployment benefit. The Government wants to put them in their place too – by curbing supplementary benefit.)

Second, the Government wants to widen the gulf between employed and unemployed workers. The ruling class uses the large pool of unemployed to force workers who still have jobs to work harder, in worse conditions, for less wages. CBI taxation committee chairman and Dunlop managing director Alan Lord spoke for employers everywhere when he said recently that his 'primary objective this year' was 'to increase the benefit of working and working harder' (*Financial Times*, 15 February 1980). His idea of increasing 'the benefit of working' is to make being out of work even more punitive than it is now.

The 'poverty trap' is something that troubles both the ruling class and workers – but for different reasons. It means that as the taxation screw is tightened and workers with lower and lower wages are forced to pay more and more taxes, the income of poor families is driven down below the level they could receive in benefits. This is intolerable to the bourgeoisie: the CBI claims that its 'ability to recruit labour is hit by the high amount of money that can be obtained from the state by unemployed people' (*Financial Times*, 11 January 1980). The ruling class is therefore bent on maintaining the differential between workers and non-workers by demanding that the state cuts benefits. At the same time it stirs up hostility to the unemployed by spreading slanders against claimants, stories about the good life on the dole and tales of plentiful jobs for those willing to work. For workers the reality is that wages are being forced down to the subsistence level of social security benefits.

Who benefits?

Reformists like Tony Benn and Stan Orme always offer Britain's comprehensive social security system as evidence of the socialist achievements of the post-war Labour Government. For them it demonstrates the compassionate essence of the welfare state. But today's crisis brings out that state's harshness and cruelty – the fact that it can only survive by impoverishing the weakest sections of society. The crisis also confirms that social security was never more than an economic expedient for the bourgeoisie, even at the best of times.

The social security system was based on William Beveridge's report *Social insurance and allied services* (1942). Beveridge's first commitment was to British capitalism:

> 'it is to the interests of employers as such that the employees should have security, should be properly maintained during inevitable intervals of unemployment or sickness, should have the content which helps make them efficient producers.'

The objective of social security payments was to make sure that workers survived periods out of work – so that when they were required for wage-labour, they could present themselves in good condition. Beveridge calculated the level of benefit conservatively, using tables drawn up in the 'thirties showing the minimum on which a worker could be expected to house, feed and clothe himself and his family. Clement Attlee's Government duly applauded his idealism and generosity – and then set about reducing his levels of benefit even further.

Everybody liked Beveridge. *The Times* described his report as a 'momentous document' (2 December 1942). Young Tory MP Quintin Hogg (now Lord Chancellor Hailsham) commended its 'practical idealism' to the House of Commons (10 February 1943). Labour left-winger Sidney Silverman told Labour's 1943 annual conference that it expressed 'the basic principle of this Party'. Later, Attlee echoed Beveridge's recognition of the importance of 'maintaining purchasing power' to the national economy, arguing that 'to allow, through mass unemployment or through sickness, great numbers of people to be ineffective as consumers is an economic loss to the country' (6 February 1946).

In the years after the introduction of Beveridge's system the British economy expanded. The sick, the old and the unemployed were able to scrape a better living than they had in the 'thirties. But poor they still remained: the meanness of the allowances made sure of that. And the social security system preserved most of the objectionable features of the earlier Poor Law system: humiliating means tests and the assumption that women are always dependent on male support. The 'insurance principle' of benefits according to paid contributions rather than of benefits according to need – a principle that had governed earlier state welfare payments – was also carried over into the new system.

In the recession of the 'seventies British capital can no longer afford even meagre concessions. And the same Labour leaders who in the past had always defended benefits on the grounds that they benefited the national economy are in no position to defend them now, when cuts in benefits are one of the best means available to regenerate British industry.

How not to fight the Tories

The Labour Party shares the Tories' commitment to reducing public expenditure in the interests of British capitalism. It even shares their faith in 'incentives' to make workers accept more intense exploitation. When junior Social Security Minister Lynda Chalker announced in Parliament that an extra 10p a week on child benefit would cost an unacceptable £60m a year, Labour left-winger and opposition spokesman on social services Stan Orme leapt to his feet: 'Child benefit is a direct incentive to the working family', he declared, meaning that it made going out to work for low wages more tolerable. Chalker promptly agreed and then counter-attacked, saying: 'if the country does not have the money to pay the benefits we cannot pay the benefits' (*The Times*, 30 January 1980).



Free school milk – rebuilding Britain after the war

The same debate takes place over every cut. The Tory Minister announces it, the Labour spokesman protests that it's not in the national interest, the Tory replies that he's sorry but the country can't afford it. Labour backbenchers, crushed by their own allegiance to British capitalism, splutter with impotent rage. The debate ends and the cut goes through.

Even when trying to defend claimants against Prentice's fraud squad Labour MPs capitulate to the ruling class attack. When leading Labour left campaigner on social security and welfare rights Frank Field wrote to *The Times* to denounce Prentice, the first point he made was that 'nobody condones social security abuse'. But for the working class the whole social security system is an abuse: condemning the few people who make more than the miserable minimum out of it is no way to defend the millions it condemns to a wretched existence.

The substance of Field's letter was that 'many of us are concerned about the extent of tax fraud'. But people on social security are not in the least concerned about tax fraud – all they want is decent pensions, benefits and dole money. Field and the whole of the Labour Party look at abuses in the same way as they view benefits and services: they're all a drain on government expenditure. Labour agrees that spending should be cut. It only fights to make sure that this is done more fairly.

Today's cuts in social security spending reveal the tendencies towards barbarism in capitalist society. They mean more children with rickets and other diseases of malnutrition and deprivation, they mean more deaths of old people from hypothermia and they mean more suicides of people despairing of life on the dole. The ruthlessness of the Tories' attack results from their commitment to maintaining the capitalist system. The feebleness of the Labour opposition results from this same commitment combined with a greater squeamishness about its consequences. The fight to improve working class living standards and maintain the unity of workers and the unemployed demands an uncompromising stand against all cuts in benefits. It demands too a fight against all those who try to justify or apologise for them.

Inez Landa

White collar trade unions

Workers in the civil service and local government used to be renowned for their moderation. But incomes policies and cuts have changed all that. We look at the leaders and the left in the CPSA and NALGO.

Reluctant bureaucrats

GOVERNMENTS have made a special effort over the past decade to force down wages in the public sector. And, since the mid 'seventies, a succession of cuts has made white-collar jobs in the public sector more and more arduous and less and less secure. So it's not surprising today that labour exchanges, dole offices and town halls are the scene of strikes and lockouts, or that white-collar public employees are flocking to join trade unions as never before.

Two of the unions which have gained most from the recent boom in white-collar recruitment are the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) and the National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO).

Over the past few years both the CPSA and NALGO have moved leftwards under the pressure of rank and file militancy. In the CPSA, the Communist Party has begun to regain some of the leading positions it had before the onset of the Cold War. Now the Stalinists vie with members of Militant and the Socialist Workers Party for influence in the bureaucracy. Bitter factional struggles rage between the left and the controlling right-wing cabal.

As for NALGO, *Tribune* supporter and general secretary Geoffrey Drain has helped turn it from a small and conservative association of clerks into the world's largest white-collar union. After less than 20 years in the TUC, NALGO's leadership is now pushing the union towards affiliation to the Labour Party. And again there's a radical left caucus – the NALGO Action Group – competing with the union bureaucracy for the membership's attentions.

Can the left in these two unions provide any alternative to the bureaucracy? Let's look at how these white-collar unions fight the cuts.

CPSA: servicing the state

The CPSA is no stranger to cuts – and its present response to them is nothing new either. Dominated in turn by Stalinists and right-wing Catholics, the bureaucracy has always put one thing first: the smooth running of the British state apparatus. When, just after the war, Britain was hit by a shortage of skilled labour, the CPSA was only too willing to offer its members' help. The official union paper *Red Tape*, then controlled by the CP, demanded 'what has your branch done to reduce staff, save staff, use staff more efficiently, speed up work, cut out bottlenecks, or otherwise contribute to easing Britain's manpower crisis?' (January 1948). Within 12 months Britain's manpower crisis was 'eased' – through the loss of 30 000 civil servants.

Today it's the same story. In 1976, when workers were beginning to reel under the blows of the Social Contract, general secretary Bill Kendall – a Catholic convert from the CP – advised his members to turn the other cheek:

> 'It is in the interests of ourselves and the nation, that Britain's civil service should be as efficient and as sensibly staffed as we can make it. We are, as we have always been, willing to do our part in approaching such an objective in the recognised democratic manner.' (*Red Tape*, March 1976)

Labour Chancellor Denis Healey promptly slashed £140m from civil service staff costs. Yet even then the CPSA opposed his economies, not because they were part of a general offensive against the working class, but because they weren't the best thing for Britain.

The CPSA's commitment to efficiency has paralysed its resistance to mass redundancies. Its approach to the cuts reflects its close identification with the state. Whenever the state needs to prune back on its bureaucracy, the CPSA's loyalty to the government machine leads it to sacrifice its members' jobs and living standards.

Left meets right

The first measure proposed by the CPSA to fight the cuts, back in 1976, was an overtime ban. At the same time CPSA members imposed an embargo on statistical work at the Department of Employment. This threw the Ministry's labour figures into chaos: management threatened a lockout, Len Murray told the CPSA to take it easy, and the executive duly backed down. 'It was never the intention of the NEC', general secretary Ken Thomas proclaimed, 'to embark on a political confrontation with a democratically elected Government about its policies' (CPSA circular, 12 January 1977). The union's campaign of limited 'industrial action' fizzled out.

Every CPSA dispute over the cuts has shown the same pattern. Whenever an attempt has been made within the union to extend the struggle the CPSA bureaucracy has killed it. Groups of workers in South London, Nuneaton and Merseyside have recently gone down to defeat with virtually no support from their leadership. The lockout of 500 CPSA members at the Glasgow Department of National Savings is another example.

Although the Scottish workers were suspended for following union policy, their union wouldn't help them. Its leaders felt that their action was ill conceived. The leadership negotiated a deal behind the strikers' backs, which compromised on overtime and promotion arrangements. The bureaucrats then railroaded this deal through at branch: a return to work followed. The Government soon announced more than 1000 redundancies in the Department of National Savings – some of them at the Glasgow office.

What about the left? During the 'seventies the CPSA's Broad Left rose to a position of considerable power within the union. Today the executive is dominated by Stalinists, members of the Militant tendency and left-wing Labourites. But the politics of the Broad Left are no use to workers fighting cuts in the civil service. Stalinist vice-president Peter Coltman is a member of the Glasgow Department of National Savings branch – and he played a key role in selling out the struggle at his own branch. *Militant* supporter Terry Adams was the full-time officer who helped him fix the backroom deal with management.

It's not surprising Broad Left bureaucrats play the same role as right-wing bureaucrats. They share the same political standpoint. They too object to the cuts not because they hit working class jobs, but because they're bad for the service. Commenting on last year's cuts in the Customs and Excise section, CP executive member Ray Alderson declared that these cuts 'belittle the work of the civil service' (*Morning Star*, 5 June 1979). Like every right-wing TUC time-server, Alderson preferred the cuts under the last Labour Government. 'At least cuts were carried out after consultation with the unions', he said. As long as it is *asked* about the cuts and briefed about what's in the state's and the civil service's interests, the CPSA leadership – left or right – is ready to sell its members out.

Tension in the town halls

Shortly after the Tory election victory last May NALGO general secretary Geoffrey Drain promised his members that he would 'fight, fight and fight the cuts'. NALGO economic committee chairman, the late Glyn Phillips, pledged full union backing for 'industrial action' against the Government's 'diabolical policies'. But despite enthusiastic support from NALGO members for local and national demonstrations against the cuts, the NALGO bureaucracy has avoided a decisive stand against the Government.

In March the union leadership could no longer hold off rank and file disgust at an offer of eight per cent after a comparability study had recommended a 14 per cent rise. It was forced to take national action. For the first time in its history NALGO instructed its members to black rate demands and local contractors in a militant drive to secure a better deal.

Threats to bring out air traffic controllers and meat inspectors increased the pressure on management. When rate arrears began to cause cash flow problems they were forced to concede almost the full claim. Although the settlement will widen differentials it showed many thousands of local government workers the way to fight for higher wages. They now have the confidence to push for the 1980 claim. However, the trade union leaders have made sure that the issue of redundancies remains in the background. And their record shows that they are better at fighting their own members than the cuts.

In 1978-79 the NALGO top brass cynically betrayed the social workers' strike for higher pay and local bargaining rights. Right from the start the executive urged them to return to work, refused national support and instructed other NALGO members to cross picket lines. When angry social workers occupied the union's St Pancras office block in protest, Drain called in the police to evict them.

The case of the social workers is only an extreme example of what has been happening to NALGO members everywhere. In September last year NALGO officials approved a national pay deal which meant a fall in real wages, and which 'committed management and staff to co-operate both nationally and locally to improve efficiency' (*Financial Times*, 15 September 1979). As with the CPSA, NALGO's dream of a streamlined, well-run government apparatus paralyses the fight against the cuts.

The Communist Party has less power in NALGO than in other unions. But it uses the influence it has to back the government and the union leadership. A recent feature on NALGO in the CP's theoretical journal *Marxism Today* included references to 'building a stronger state in the interests of the working class' and calls for 'new forms of participation' (January 1980). 'Participation' here means participation in decisions on how the cuts are to be made. The CP confesses: 'Yes, bureaucracy does exist' and goes on to talk about 'the tendency to build empires of unnecessary staff'. Perhaps the editorial board of *Marxism Today* would like to explain to the clerical workers who lost their jobs when the Tories axed several quangos last year that their jobs were 'unnecessary'.

NAG – no problem to Drain

The Stalinists say that the NALGO Action Group (NAG) has fallen prey to the 'ultra-left' 'rank and file' ideas of the SWP. Let's have a closer look. The latest *NALGO Action News* presents a special feature on the cuts. Why are the cuts being made? 'It is not simply that the Country is broke and that the Government is forced to make cuts'. No, the problem is nothing but Conservative pig-headedness: 'the truth is that cuts are made so the Tory Bosses can pay off themselves, their friends and their class'. In fact 'the Country' isn't broke after all. As a recent NALGO Action pamphlet called *Fighting the cuts* explains, 'the money is available': the only difficulty is that 'successive governments have handed it over to the rich and other business interests. It is they who must foot the bill'. Thus all that NALGO members need is a new government which will hand over the available money to them rather than to the rich. In fact this is the same Labour Government that the CP and Geoffrey Drain would like to see returned to office. In its eagerness to connect with the average NALGO member the SWP ends up in line with the Stalinists and the trade union bureaucracy.

For all its talk of 'rank and file' trade union organisation the SWP can provide no alternative to the bureaucracy. That demands a political challenge to the identification of the white-collar public sector unions with the state apparatus they service. When civil servants and local government officers put their interests as *workers* before the efficiency of the government administration they will put their fight to save jobs and wages on a solid foundation.

Paul Fenwick

Housing: Labour sticks by the law

The Tories plan massive cuts in house-building and massive increases in rents and rates. Today many in the labour movement recall the fight against the housing policies of the last Tory Government. One case stands out: the battle led by the councillors of Clay Cross.



Double-cross at Clay Cross

CLAY CROSS is an old Derbyshire mining town with a strong labour movement tradition. It is not prosperous. As the local pits closed down in the 'sixties new industries passed it by. When the Tories returned to power in 1970, 20 per cent of the town's 10 000 population was out of work. Despite extensive slum clearance and renovation schemes housing standards remained low. So, however, did rents.

The Tory Housing Finance Act became law in July 1972. It imposed rises in council rents of £1 a week from October with further increases to follow annually. The response from Clay Cross was immediate and determined. The town's 11 councillors had been elected earlier in the year on the slogan 'Defeat the Tory rent robbery'. On 1 October posters proclaimed popular defiance from council estate windows throughout the town: 'No rent increases paid here'.

Tory Housing Minister Geoffrey Rippon responded by ordering an extraordinary audit of Clay Cross council's books. The councillors answered with a demonstration of 3000 local people, together with trade unionists, members of tenants' associations and socialists from all over the country.

> 'They marched 15 abreast down the High Street and completely blocked the main Derby to Sheffield road. They marched through the housing estates of the town and many of those tenants who had not already turned out, joined as the long caterpillar of protest wound its way past. Clay Cross had never seen anything like it before.' (David Skinner and Julia Langdon, *The story of Clay Cross*, 1974)

When the auditor arrived a few days later he found the council chamber packed by 300 tenants and supporters holding aloft a banner which read: 'Clay Cross will not implement the Act'.

In February 1973 the tenants began a rent strike against the auditor's judgement that the councillors were guilty of 'negligence and misconduct' for not raising the rents. The auditor held the councillors personally liable for uncollected revenues of about £7000, but, backed by the tenants, they refused to pay. The Government therefore dismissed them from office and, in October 1973, appointed a Housing Commissioner to collect the missing rents. Yet, six months later, civil servant William Skillington departed without a penny in revenues from the council tenants.

However, the Clay Cross struggle became more and more isolated. In the early months of the Housing Finance Act a number of councils had stood out against it. But one by one they had given way. By January 1974 Clay Cross was left to fight alone. In the same month Lord Denning dismissed the Clay Cross councillors' appeal against disqualification from office. The future looked bleak.

Soon, however, the Tory attack on Clay Cross was overtaken by events. Heath's reaction to the miners' strike plunged Britain into the 'three-day week'. Within a few weeks of Denning's judgement Harold Wilson was back in Downing Street. The people of Clay Cross turned to the Labour Party to vindicate their stand.

Promises, promises

> 'The Clay Cross council . . . believed in the Labour Party. They kept faith with the Labour Party.' (*The story of Clay Cross*)

Clay Cross had a 100 per cent Labour council. From 1959 until 1974 the Labour Party won every seat it contested. The local Labour MPs had been staunch supporters of the councillors' stand. Indeed Dennis Skinner, prominent left-winger and MP for neighbouring Bolsover, came from Clay Cross. He had two brothers on the council, one of whom – David Skinner – went on to co-author the official history of the struggle. North-east Derbyshire MP Tom Swain also played an influential role in the campaign.

Back in 1972 the Labour Party conference had voted to support councils that opposed the Tory Housing Finance Act. Although Labour's National Executive Committee later backed down on its promise of financial assistance to renegade councils this position was reversed the following year. Labour's radical 1973 conference – held in the heat of the Clay Cross struggle – declared that any future Labour government would remove 'all penalties, financial or otherwise' from councillors who had 'courageously refused' to implement the Housing Finance Act. Tony Benn later reassured anxious councillors that the next Labour government would act on the conference decision (*The Times*, 10 December 1973).

So when Labour returned to office in 1974 the people of Clay Cross were looking forward to some help. An expectant David Skinner said: 'the Labour Government will now have to honour the promises made at the last party conference' (*The Times*, 28 March 1974). But these hopes were to be disappointed. A deputation from the town to Environment Secretary Anthony Crosland got the cold shoulder: he refused to cancel the rent arrears or withdraw the Housing Commissioner. Crosland further threatened to fine the council rent collectors if they did not go out and collect the missing rents.

Labour's commitment to financial stringency in local government threw Clay Cross council into confusion. When the council's rent collectors decided to obey Crosland's directive the councillors threatened them with the sack and then suspended them from duty. The rest of the council workers immediately came out on strike. Offended, the councillors occupied the town hall offices, protesting that the rent collectors had only been suspended 'for their own protection' (*The Times*, 22 March 1974).

From then on matters went from bad to worse. Following Labour's second election victory of 1974, Crosland told the Commons that surcharges on Labour councillors under the Housing Finance Act were running at between £1m and £2m. With his colleagues preparing major cuts in public spending to bale British industry out of its deepening crisis, he had no hesitation in pursuing a hard line on Clay Cross:

> 'The Government do not intend to rescind these charges retrospectively, nor to use public funds to discharge the financial liabilities incurred by these councillors. Any funds for that purpose must come from private subscriptions, organised by those associated with the decisions taken at the relevant party conferences.' (*The Times*, 7 November 1974)

Labour then added insult to injury by flattering the councils that had implemented the Tories' rent rises. As left-winger Lena Jeger put it to the party conference of December, it would be 'unfair' to support Clay Cross when 'many councils and councillors . . . with heavy hearts, had had to carry out the provisions of the Housing Finance Act' (*The Times*, 2 December 1974). And, by a large majority, the conference backed this reactionary stand.

Thus was the trust of Clay Cross in the Labour Party cruelly betrayed.

An Englishman's home

The Clay Cross councillors also put their faith in the whole system of British justice. In their own minds they were too 'cunning and politically astute' to believe in flouting the law 'for the sake of confrontation'; instead they looked for ways around what they regarded as special, 'political' legislation (*The story of Clay Cross*). The councillors' conviction that the law was sacrosanct disarmed them when it was used as a weapon against Clay Cross.

The Labour Party reinforced the councillors' deference to the courts. Back at the 1973 conference deputy party leader Ted Short made it clear that while opposing Tory policy was one thing, transgressing the rule of law was most definitely another.

> 'The Housing Finance Act presented every Labour councillor with a dreadful dilemma in being forced by the law to do something utterly repugnant to him and that depressed the living standards of the people he represented. It also presented the NEC with a dilemma. Even a moment's thought would show that the NEC could not advise Labour councillors to act unlawfully. If they did this they themselves would be committing an offence. It was the councillors and their families who had to bear the consequences. But Clay Cross was something rather special. (Applause). Everybody in Britain, in the labour movement and outside, were full of admiration and sympathy for the stand Mr David Skinner and his colleagues had taken. The motion should not be taken by anybody as encouragement to any Labour councillor to act unlawfully.' (*The Times*, 4 October 1973)

Labour's message was that Clay Cross was a 'special' case – but not so special as to justify breaking laws that decreed cuts in working class living standards.

Six months later Wilson used the labour movement's faith in British justice to good effect. Supporting Crosland's refusal to write off the Clay Cross surcharges, he proclaimed that 'the law of the land, however unfair, however oppressive, must be obeyed until it is repealed' (*The Times*, 5 April 1974). This statement was considered to be 'a bombshell' in Clay Cross (*The story of Clay Cross*). But Wilson's statement was the logical conclusion, drawn by the Labour Government, from the previous party conference.

This bombshell however failed to shake the faith of the councillors and their supporters in either the Labour Party or the law. When the courts commanded payment of the full surcharge plus interest in the summer of 1974 David Skinner claimed his sovereign rights as a free-born Briton. 'An Englishman's home is his castle' he declared, continuing that he would face bankruptcy rather than 'pay a Tory fine' (*The Times*, 3 August 1974). Left-wing Labour MP Bob Cryer spoke for all the councillors when he complained that 'it now appears that the law is taking the side of the previous Conservative Administration' (*The Times*, 3 August 1974). Both Skinner and Cryer missed the point. The problem was not that the law was taking the Tory side but that the Labour Party was taking the side of the law, the side of the state – against the working class.

The reluctance of the councillors to challenge bourgeois legality undermined their struggle against the Government. As far as they were concerned the Labour Government 'had to uphold the law'; they found its reluctance to encourage councils to break the law 'understandable' (*The story of Clay Cross*). Their faith in law let the Labour Government off the hook.

Should auld acquaintance be forgot?

The Clay Cross campaign was coming to the end of the road. In February 1975 the councillors were surcharged an additional £67 000 – for the 'mismanagement' of the council's finances. And, that August, they were served with bankruptcy notices, while council tenants were forced by North-east Derbyshire district council to pay an extra 50p a week rent – plus a supplementary 24p to make up Clay Cross council's debts.

The Clay Cross issue was revived for a few moments at the 1977 Labour Party conference. A motion calling for the removal of the councillors' disqualification from public office was unanimously passed. *The Times* commented smugly on the cynicism of the Labour Party:

> 'After the motion had been carried by a huge majority and delegates went on to the final stages of the conference, singing the 'Red Flag' and 'Auld Lang Syne', ministers indicated that it is unlikely that the Government will act on the motion' (*The Times*, 8 October 1977).

The real story of Clay Cross is that, courageous and determined though they were, its councillors didn't have the politics to win. They looked to their Labour Party for assistance and exonerated it when it stabbed them in the back. They thought the law could be manipulated in their interests and failed to defy it when things turned out differently. The Clay Cross story should be brought to mind by workers taking on the housing cuts today.

Andrew Clarkson

WHO'S AFRAID OF MARGARET THATCHER?

Review: **Zig Layton-Henry**, ed, *Conservative Party politics*, Macmillan, £6.95. **George Hutchinson**, *The last Edwardian at Number Ten*, Quartet, £6.50.

After a year in power the Conservative Government is secure in office but divided over strategy. The left is, for the most part, united in vulgar anti-Toryism but confused about how to fight Tory policies. Two recent books provide an opportunity to assess the present conflicts in the Conservative Party, Thatcher's policies and the response of the left to them.

The hawks and the wets

The squabbles between factions led by hardliners Keith Joseph and Geoffrey Howe and moderates James Prior and Ian Gilmour reflect a crisis of bourgeois strategy. So far none of the Government's measures have reversed the decline in investment or put an end to the stagnation of industrial production. Tory disagreements stem from nagging doubts about Howe's budgetary and Joseph's industrial policies. They centre on three areas: monetarism, import controls and public spending cuts.

Monetarist theory says that to reduce inflation you need to keep a tight rein on the money supply. But there are so many pressures to increase the supply of money that the Government cannot contain them all. What's more, the sky-high interest rates that monetarist policies produce discourage investment in manufacturing.

Capitalists in British industries which are particularly vulnerable to imports want the Government to protect them against foreign competition. They air their views through back-bench Tory MPs who have recently become staunch advocates of import controls. The Government however must pursue the interests of the capitalist class *as a whole*. At present the British bourgeoisie dares not risk the retaliation which protectionism would bring. So Thatcher has to ride roughshod over her own constituency of small businessmen in the overall interests of British capitalism.

Finally, cuts. All Conservatives agree on the need to curb public expenditure but they are not equally capable of facing the consequences. Some are reluctant to provoke more acute class conflict over jobs, wages and services. Thatcher has faced opposition inside the Cabinet (over departmental staff cuts), from the Lords (over school transport), from her back-benchers (over child benefits) and from Tory local authorities (over cash limits and cuts in the rate support grant).

All Tories want to reduce working class living standards and weaken the trade unions. But they differ over how far they should go and how fast. Thus the major Cabinet rift over Prior's anti-union legislation as Thatcher pushed him to extend the legal restrictions on picketing during the steel strike.

The Tory tradition

For all its family quarrels the Tories remain the party of the British bourgeoisie. But do the policies and style of Margaret Thatcher 'represent something qualitatively new in British politics'? This is the opinion radical academic Stuart Hall contributed to a pompous debate about 'Thatcherism' in the Stalinist theoretical journal *Marxism Today* (February 1980).

One of the points that emerges from *Conservative Party politics* edited by Zig Layton-Henry is the relatively unchanging nature of the Tory Party. Despite the displacement of the old aristocratic leadership (Macmillan, Home) by the new petit-bourgeois party chiefs (Heath, Thatcher), Conservative politics have centred around the same themes ever since the Second World War.

Defence of the free market economy, rugged individualism and hostility to state intervention have always been the mainstay of the Tory right. Authoritarianism and reactionary attitudes towards immigrants, the unemployed, strikers and juvenile delinquents go on ritual display at every Party conference. Rooted in a solid middle class base, this wing of the Conservative Party has coexisted (usually peacefully) with the mainstream of post-war Tory politics. The dominant trend – which finds more favour in the City and in company board rooms – combines pragmatic acceptance of state intervention in industry and welfare services with traditional Tory paternalism towards the unions, women and blacks.

The balance between the right and the centre has often been re-negotiated in the past 30 years. The 13 years of Tory rule from 1951-64 coincided with the post-war boom. As the economy expanded with extensive state support and the government won the close co-operation of the unions, the Tory right declined. This was the Macmillan era captured in George Hutchinson's *The last Edwardian at Number Ten*. When right-wing Chancellor Peter Thorneycroft (now Party chairman and recently the architect of Thatcher's triumph) tried to cut public spending in response to the transient crisis of 1957 Macmillan sacked him: 'a little local difficulty' was his famous riposte to the right.

Tory governments in the 'seventies faced crisis and growing class conflict – conditions dramatically different from the 'fifties. The Tory response – from Heath's Selsdon Man of 1970 to the North Finchley Iron Lady of 1980 – has been a shift to the right within the Party. The Tories now revive the laisser-faire notions of a long lost capitalist golden age to justify austerity measures and cuts in public spending. They orchestrate reaction on every issue from abortion to Afghanistan.

Attacks on the working class and squeals from Bournemouth for hanging and flogging are nothing new. The crisis has simply provoked a shift of emphasis within the terms of post-war Toryism. But for all its promotion of individual free enterprise and petit-bourgeois philistinism the Tories must still pragmatically pursue the general needs of capital. Thus despite Thatcher's affection for Mary Whitehouse and Joseph's for Adam Smith the Tory centre still rules. State intervention must stay – no private capitalist will buy most of British Steel, British Shipbuilding or British Leyland. And thousands of Thatcher's beloved small businessmen will go to the wall. That, despite 'the most right-wing government since the war' is the consequence of the capitalist crisis for the Government's most right-wing supporters.

Thatcherism and Stalinism

The great debate on 'Thatcherism' within the Communist Party attributes Labour's electoral failure to the appeal of Thatcher's brand of Tory politics to British workers. Leading CP intellectual Martin Jacques hopes that although many were duped, they may have learnt their lesson by now: 'large numbers of people who voted Tory were not convinced "Thatcherists" and are now probably regretting where they put their cross' (*Marxism Today*, October 1979). In fact the Labour vote held up remarkably well last May in view of Labour's record. The Tories probably only gained support from some skilled workers disgusted with the decline in real wages and differentials which resulted from five years of Labour incomes policies.

Despite its incoherence Jacques' thesis does serve a purpose. It distracts attention from the disastrous consequences of the Communist Party's programme, especially the 'left alternative economic strategy'. This is not surprising since the last Labour Government adopted many of its key elements. The NEB (British Leyland) and nationalisation (British Shipbuilders) both cost thousands of workers' jobs. Labour lost the election because while workers were cynical about its ability to defend their interests, the middle classes flocked to the Tories to save them from the effects of the crisis.

The CP blames the working class for its own failings. If workers didn't vote for the CP or Labour then they must have become intoxicated by 'Thatcherism', runs the facile Stalinist diagnosis. Theories of 'Thatcherism' constantly miss the point. Thatcher's appeal to reaction is aimed not so much to win working class support – most workers detest Thatcher – but to isolate opposition to the Government. The way to confront this is by strengthening class politics, not by pandering to Tory pre-occupations about 'law and order' and 'state bureaucracy' as the CP does.

In fact the CP isolates 'Thatcherism' as a peculiar ideological problem and separates opposition to it from the defence of working class interests. An article in the same issue of *Marxism Today* in which Professor Hall pontificates on 'Thatcherism' takes the CP's narrow anti-Toryism to its logical conclusion. Dave Priscott explains its first principle in the South Yorkshire campaign against the cuts. 'In the initial stages', he writes, 'it would be a mistake to build a campaign around a demand that the Labour Council should not implement the cuts – the whole drive in the first place must be to build a united movement against the Tory Government that was introducing the cuts' (February 1980).

Get it? You fight the cuts by not fighting the cuts, but by fighting the Tories! Or to put it another way – you accept the cuts but oppose 'Thatcherism'. Environment Secretary Michael Heseltine likes this sort of anti-Toryism. When recently castigating some renegade Tory councils who had failed to cut staff he singled out South Yorkshire and a few other Labour councils for special praise. Sheffield had pruned 235 jobs last year (*The Times*, 25 March 1980).

Both these books provide limited insights into the Conservative Party. Layton-Henry's is an eclectic collection of essays by academics and party hacks with a foreword by leading 'wet' Ian Gilmour. Hutchinson's is strong on inner-party intrigue and anecdote. Neither is worth reading, but either is worth more than a lifetime subscription to *Marxism Today*.

Ian Sinclair

Letters

Unconditional support?

Dear comrades,

Please help me see the logic of Paul Saunders' ('The Birmingham bombings', *the next step*, No 3, March 1980) and Frank Richards' ('No Equivocation', *Revolutionary Communist Papers* No 2, May 1978) positions on the killing of working class people in an oppressor nation by fighters for national freedom from the oppressed nation.

I do support the struggle of the Irish people against British imperialism. I do not denounce 'violence in the abstract' ('No Equivocation'). I do not question the form of the struggle. I do question the attacking of targets which consist of:

- workers (largely)
- non-combatants (ie not military)
- the unprepared and unwarned
- those not at that moment engaged in arms manufacture or other support of the oppressors' conduct of the violence against the oppressed nation
- those not at that moment organised to support the oppressors.

I raise this question as a revolutionary socialist who is and will be involved in activity in the oppressor nation to aid the victims of imperialism.

Yours fraternally,

Tom Richardson
Cleveland

Paul Saunders *writes:*

In all wars there are casualties who are workers, non-combatants, the unprepared and unwarned, and so on. But we cannot determine our attitude to a war by responding to violent incidents.

In the Irish War we judge that British imperialism is reactionary and that the national liberation struggle contains the only possibility for socialism in Ireland. We give our **unconditional** *support to this struggle and accept that it may lead to civilian casualties because to do otherwise would be to impose terms on it. That would only hold back the fight against imperialism.*

Our correspondent's position is contradictory. He says he does not question the form of struggle of those oppressed by imperialism but he goes on to do just that. Despite his commitment to solidarity with the Irish people he is ready to withdraw support in certain circumstances. But there can be no middle way for socialists on the Irish War: either they support British imperialism or they support the Irish people. Our aim is to do more than 'aid the victims of imperialism'. It is to help defeat imperialism altogether.

Militant defended

Dear comrades,

I'm not a supporter of the Militant tendency but I thought your attack on them ('Militant: why all the fuss?', *the next step*, No 3, March 1980) was unjustified and sectarian. Ted Grant may have made a few mistakes in a pamphlet he wrote 30 years ago but what's that got to do with Militant's political activity today? Militant's economic theories may be up the spout but at least they're fighting *with* the labour movement inside the *mass* organisations of the working class. You're content just to sit on the sidelines and criticise every other group for their lack of revolutionary purity.

Yours in disgust,

Bill Scanton
Brent

Rob Knight *writes:*

Militant *supporters have been peddling the myth that the Labour Party is a 'mass organisation of the working class' for so long that they seem to be the only people around who still believe it. Everybody else can see that the active membership of the Labour Party is predominantly middle class. Today Labour's claims to be a working class party rest only on its formal ties with the unions and its ability to get workers to vote for it every five years. This is where Militant comes in: its youthful members keep alive Labour's working class image and do the legwork in the flagging constituency parties. That's why Labour's NEC is so reluctant to proscribe Militant.*

For the consequences of lack of what our correspondent likes to call 'purity' see the 14 March issue of **Militant**, *which applauds the legend on one home-made placard at the recent TUC demo. It read 'Thatcher's got one, Joseph is one'. Now that's really going to rid the labour movement of its backwardness on women's oppression, isn't it?*

Southall- never again?

'Black youths battle with police in Bristol riot' screamed The Times on 3 April as police repression of Britain's black people provoked a major outbreak of street-fighting. Within hours Home Secretary William Whitelaw was on his feet in Parliament, Labour left leader and local MP Tony Benn was in Bristol cooling tempers and race relations supremo David Lane was warning of the dangers of further unrest.

Bourgeois politicians cast their minds back a year to Southall, April 1979, to weigh the merits of direct repression and 'community policing'. On this dramatic anniversary of Southall we ask: is the labour movement ready to defend the black community?

23 April 1979. The National Front plans an election rally in Southall's town hall. The community mobilises to stop them. Marching in step, more than 5000 truncheon wielding policemen are drafted in from all over London and the Home Counties. In a six-hour pitched battle 750 people, mostly Asians, are arrested and 342 people are charged with offences ranging from obstruction to grievous bodily harm. Hundreds more sustain serious injuries; some are beaten within an inch of their lives. And one – Blair Peach, an East London teacher – is beaten an inch beyond.

24 April 1979. Rain soaked Asian youths walk back to Southall from the motorway verges where they were dumped, bruised and battered after a night in police custody. The victims of the town's police riot face a new day and a new adversary – the courts. They go on to have the charges against them rubber stamped by Barnet magistrates court. Up to 70 per cent are convicted – many are sentenced to massive fines and some to terms in prison.

27 April 1980. A year later blacks from all over Britain recall the events of Southall with anger and bitterness in a national demonstration in London. Representatives of the official labour movement make pious declarations of support and solidarity after a year of passivity in face of police repression in Southall and elsewhere. And the organisations of the reformist and radical left turn out too – after twelve months of appeals to the state to oppress blacks less brutally and more democratically.

The left buckles under

Coming only 10 days before the General Election, Southall forced both Tory and Labour leaders to comment. Their reaction was predictable: all agreed that the blame lay with the intemperate Asian youths who dominated the anti-NF demonstration. Thatcher condemned the violence as a 'disgrace to democracy' and told young blacks to heed the advice of their elders in future. Once again blacks met the same treatment from a Labour government that they always expect from the Tories. Labour united with the Tories to denounce Southall just as they joined forces to implement immigration controls, back the use of 'Sus' laws and step up passport raids.

But the reaction of the radical left was perhaps unexpected. Buckling under the press campaign against 'extremists of the left and right', the Anti-Nazi League immediately began to distance itself from any 'excesses' practised by Asian youths. Anti-apartheid campaigner and ANL leader Peter Hain was at pains to stress that his organisation had done its best to prevent a fight: 'We had meetings days before about it. We warned the authorities continually about the dangers because we knew the explosive feelings of the young blacks'. In fact, he pleaded, the ANL missed most of the action: 'By the time the League arrived at 6.0pm, over 300 young blacks were already running riot in the area' (*Evening News*, 24 April 1979). Much to Hain's dismay, the 'explosive' Asian youths had not waited till the evening for the moderate guidance of the ANL. What were they supposed to do between 1pm, when the local 'general strike' began, and 6pm? Southall had begun to brim with police as early as mid afternoon.

Of course, Hain – Young Liberal turned *Tribune* supporter – is far from being the most radical leader in the ANL. So what about the IMG and the SWP, who see the ANL as an opportunity to 'politicise' people who might otherwise be led astray by the NF? Despite their avowed aim of opposing fascism 'wherever it rears its ugly head', 'smashing the NF' and 'driving the Nazis back into the sewers', they too joined Thatcher, Callaghan and Hain in the chorus of condemnation. 'There are times', IMG leader and on-the-spot-reporter Tariq Ali lectured the youth of Southall, 'when the brain is more useful than brawn'. He went on:

> 'the impatience of the "young lions" is overpowering. They attack a bus and clashes with the police follow. Walls are knocked down so that bricks can be used as missiles. It is a big mistake, born of anger and frustration, and as the day evolves everyone will realise that this is so.' (*Socialist Challenge*, 26 April 1979)

Self-defence is an offence

In the heat of battle Tariq Ali 'forgot' all his organisation's sermonising about self-defence. The slogan 'self-defence is no offence' is a blatant lie. Any black who decides to defend himself from racist attack will come up against the force of the British state. As Southall well knows self-defence *is* an offence – especially at Barnet magistrates court.

The IMG only raises the slogan and postures about its 'support' for blacks because it is incapable of winning the labour movement to the political and physical defence of black people. Most of the time the IMG cheers from the sidelines as blacks defend themselves alone. This time, when blacks found it necessary to meet violence with violence, Ali discovered that self-defence was 'a big mistake'. The 'brawny' Asian youths were not blessed with the university education of Tariq Ali, the IMG's 'Socialist Unity' candidate for Southall in the General Election. Otherwise they might have had the good sense to throw paper planes made of ANL leaflets at the police instead of bricks.

The SWP couldn't bring itself to condone 'self-defence' either. As SWP leader and ANL chief Paul Holborrow so honestly put it:

> 'The real lesson for all of us was the determination of the Asian youth. They were apparently so alienated from the police, and so appalled by the presence of the NF in their midst that they were prepared to take to the streets with great militancy. But that was spontaneous: it was not encouraged or provoked by the ANL.' (*The Observer*, 29 April 1979)

Like the IMG, the SWP sought to distance itself from the militancy of black youth – because the ANL hadn't orchestrated it.

Why did the SWP respond in this way? The reason is that for the last five years it has made the NF the major focus of its attentions in the struggle against racism. It has ignored the real tasks of building opposition to immigration controls and organising labour movement resistance to all forms of racial oppression. The 1978 annual conference of the ANL agreed 'overwhelmingly' that immigration controls were a bad thing but 'decided not to make agreement on this binding on ANL members' (*Socialist Worker*, 15 July 1978). The SWP adapted to filmstars, footballers, liberals and reformists who would never oppose all immigration controls. The SWP's diplomacy also led it to disclaim any responsibility for the violence in Southall. People who are encouraged by the ANL to think of the NF as a threat to British democracy will not support blacks who throw bricks at the police.

'Disband the SPG'?

Workers throughout Britain have experienced the Special Patrol Group (or one of its regional equivalents) on demonstrations and picket lines. In every major city black communities have been particular targets of police harassment. Revolutionaries want to get rid of the SPG – and the police and the bourgeois state itself. We see the state as an instrument of class domination. The state always acts on the bosses' behalf; to defend their interests workers have to confront the state and its entire police force.

This was not the way the left approached Southall. It set out to contrast the brutal 'elite' SPG to the ordinary, decent bobby on the beat and proposed a public inquiry so that one part of the state could investigate another.

On this issue there is little to distinguish *Socialist Worker* from *Tribune* and the statements of the TUC. Take the Labour lefts after the election:

> 'One of the first tasks facing the next Labour Government will be to re-introduce supervision over the activities of our police force. They must also put policemen back on the streets as friends of the community rather than have them make war against it.' (*Tribune*, 31 August 1979)

As for members of a recent TUC delegation to the Home Secretary, they

> 'emphasised that they were not concerned with criticising ordinary police officers, who have a vital role to play in protecting the community, often in dangerous circumstances, and whose common-sense in difficult industrial disputes is usually exemplary. However there was concern about the activities of the Special Patrol Group . . . .' (*TUC press statement*, 29 January 1980)

Now try the SWP's 'interrogation' of Police Commissioner David McNee on the Blair Peach affair:

> 'Why don't you "face up" to the fact that you have a murderer in your ranks "whatever the cost"? Why is the murder being covered up? We demand an answer.' (*Socialist Worker*, 16 June 1979)

A year later the SWP was still asking the police to own up:

> 'There are more guilty men at large. Whitelaw – the man in charge of the SPG – and McNee – who describes them as 'my patrol group' – must take responsibility for this grotesque cover-up of murder. They should resign.
>
> 'And the SPG should be disbanded.' (*Socialist Worker*, 22 March 1980)

By concentrating on the 'extraordinary' brutality of the SPG, the SWP gives its approval to the ordinary policeman – the one who truncheons striking steelworkers and smashes up black homes in search of illegal immigrants.

Smash all immigration controls!

Unlike the rest of the left we do not condemn the aggressive resistance put up by the Asian youths. But in itself this is not enough. The real lesson of Southall is that opposition to *every aspect* of racial oppression must be taken into *every one* of Britain's trade unions. The focus of this opposition must be an attack on all immigration controls and an exposure of the complicity of the Labour Party in them.

Support for immigration controls binds workers to the British nation state. It reinforces the view that the problems they face are due to foreigners and immigrants, not British capitalism. It is this nationalist outlook – not the NF, the Tories or the SPG – which is the worst enemy facing the working class. With its support for immigration controls the Labour Party fosters nationalism in the labour movement.

Right now the danger is that disgust with the Tories' new nationality law will be channelled into support for the Labour Party as the 'lesser evil' party on racism. The Campaign Against Racist Laws (CARL) has a lot to answer for here.

CARL was set up by the Stalinist Indian Workers Associations with the help of the Communist Party and the SWP. In response to the decline in the NF the radical left put the ANL in cold storage and turned to CARL. It is also a 'popular', 'broad-based' campaign. The only difference with the ANL is its choice of target: the Tories rather than the NF.

Unable and unwilling to take on the fight against all immigration laws, CARL has decided to oppose 'racist' controls. In the interests of unity with the Stalinists the SWP goes along with the reformist fiction that the immigration controls of an imperialist country such as Britain could be 'non-racist'.

Workers' defence

Our job is to make sure that the police do not get away with another Southall. The only force that can prevent state repression of blacks is the labour movement. Once workers are convinced of the importance of fighting racial oppression then the defence of ethnic minorities against the fascists and the police can break through the platitudes of the labour bureaucracy and become a reality on the streets of Britain.

This is the objective of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency. Our campaign East London Workers Against Racism has begun to build workers' defence against racist attacks in Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Newham. ELWAR has taken up instances of harassment conducted by the immigration authorities and by the police. ELWAR has taken opposition to all immigration controls into the local labour movement. ELWAR is a beginning in the struggle to prevent a repetition of Southall in 1980.

Fenna King

SOUTHALL DEMONSTRATION

Sunday 27 April
1pm Speakers Corner
Marble Arch tube

March with the RCT for the slogans
Smash all immigration controls
Workers' defence against racist attacks

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